

AL-IMAM MAGAZINE (1906-1908): THE STUDY OF KAUM MUDA' S THOUGHT ON ISLAMIC EDUCATION RENEWAL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract

In the early 20th century, the discussion of Islamic educational progress in Southeast Asia can not be separated from the thought of Kaum Muda in Al-Imam magazine. Some researchers have touched the role of Islamic renewal scholars group in modernizing Islamic education in Southeast Asia, unfortunately this kind of thought which encourages renewal gains less support. This article seeks to fill in this gap by mainly focusing on the thought of Kaum Muda about the education renewal in Al-Imam magazine. This study has three objectives, first, to investigate The Kaum Muda's view of knowledge, second, to analyze The Kaum Muda's view about the balance of religious knowledge and general knowledge, and third, to assess The Kaum Muda's view towards education reformation. This is a qualitative research method with Al-Imam manuscript as the main research resource and the other secondary source as the research support. The research results revealed that, firstly, Al-Imam emphasized greatly towards knowledge as one of the ways to achieved improvement for both in religious field and real life. Secondly, Al-Imam stated that religious knowledge and general knowledge cannot be separated since there will be no improvement without these two things. Thirdly, Al-Imam encouraged the importance of education modernization in traditional Islamic education institution in order to generate scientifically insightful Muslim generation.

Keywords: Kaum Muda, Al-Imam, Knowledge, Education, Renewal.

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INTRODUCTION

Al-Imam is the renewal magazine in Southeast Asia. In the early of 20th century, this media became the most important part of modernists for spreading Islamic values in advancing and liberating. Regrading to Malay nation as to liberate Indonesia from colonialism, unfortunately discussion about this problem was very limited, from both its perspective and focus. Among researchers who focused on investigation of Al-Imam, Mahmud Yusuf formulated in his discussion that the the first phase of Islamic renewal movement in Southeast Asia was pioneered by *Kaum Padri*, and the second phase which was pioneered by *Kaum Muda* was leaded by Sheikh Ahmad Khatib al-Minangkabawi (1855-1916) and Sheikh Tahir Jalaluddin (1869-1945). Through comparative approach, the author compares to later connects the first phase of renewal with Wahabi movement and the second phase with Islamic modernization movement. In the beginning of the second phase, Sheikh Tahir with his fellow friends were publishing Al-Imam magazine in 1906 in Singapore. According to researcher, the main ideas of this magazine are the purification of Islamic values from all kind of deviation as well as to modernize Islamic school educational system by referring to Egypt and Western education system. The researcher employed historical approach to explore the relationship of purification history and the Al-Imam renewal with the thoughts that have occurred in Egypt and Islamic countries in the 19th century (Yusuf, 1987). So, the focus of this research is not to explore the depth of the issue, but to place Al-Imam position in the Islamic thought renewal history which was interrelated from one phase to another phase.

The research based on political approach was conducted by Abdul Aziz Mat Ton. He revealed the wrong interpretation of Al-Imam in the political history of Indonesia and Malaysia; he stated that Al-Imam is an indigenous political magazine against imperialism and Western colonialism in Southeast Asia. Nationalism and religiosity have been employed to raise the love of civilization, history, and their very own country against the

power of Western imperialism. In this study, Ton focused the discussion on the political articles in Al-Imam magazine and also on the article related closely with politics, such as educational issue. According to him, the educational issue article was not merely improving science and education, but for political goal, independency. (Ton, 2000) From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the aim of his research was not about the content of the article, but to reveal the real value behind the content of the article or hidden agenda of Al-Imam.

In fact, many figures have talked about Al-Imam in their discussion, namely, Roff, (Roff, 1967) Hamka, (Hamka, 1982) Noer, (Noer, 1978) dan Azra, (Azra, 1999) however their discussion were not sufficient to be used in further investigation. Hence, a research which focuses on *Kaum Muda* thought in relation with science and education in Al-Imam magazine has yet to be done. This research is of vital importance to be conducted and it requires depth and comprehensive investigation since this kind of thought has encouraged the social and political alteration in Southeast Asia.

AL-IMAM MAGAZINE PROFILE

Al-Imam magazine is the pioneer of the Islamic renewal magazine in the Southeast Asia early in the 20th AD century, (Roff, 1967) the renewal ideas of the *Kaum Muda* containing in *Al-Imam* has contributed positively toward the progress of Malay people in many aspects, particularly religious, (Azra, 1999) political, (Ton, 2000) science and education. (Faisal, 2011) (Mustaffa, 2008). *Al-Imam* was published in Singapore on July 23rd in 1906 AD (Roff, 1967) and last on December 25th in 1908, located on Weld Street No. 17-18 Singapore. This magazine used classic Malay language, (Ton, 2006) as its communication language and written in the Malay Arabic script. Figures who were involved in this organization can be grouped into two, namely, author group and editor group, they were three Islamic Scholars, namely, Sheikh Tahir, (Roff, 1967) Syed Sheikh Ahmad Alhadi (1867-1934), (Roff, 1967) and Haji Abbas bin Muhammad Taha

(b. 1885). This group was considered important since they were the source of *Al-Imam* ideology renewal. The second group was those who played role in the management, namely, Salim Al-Kalali, Haji Mustafa bin Ismail, Muhammad bin 'Aqil bin Yahya, Syed Hasan bin Syahab. (Roff, 1967) (Ton, 2006) This group was also crucial due to their contribution toward the publication and distribution of *Al-Imam* magazine. *Al-Imam* was distributed toward Malay people in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, (Ton, 2000) as can be seen in the following map:



Figure 1

Al-Imam magazine distribution (1906-1908)

Map source: http://alanqasaharica.blogspot.com/2016/10/peta-sejarah-indonesia-periode-1900-2016_7.html. Accessed in. 4-1-2020

Al-Imam was distributed toward Islamic scholars in Southeast Asia in which they were called as representative with two functions, namely, as magazine sales agent and as correspondent from each region. In Malaysia, there were known 12 people as the magazine agents and magazine correspondents, spread over Tanah Semenanjung and Sabah, and there were also known 23 people in Indonesia who spread over Sumatra Island, Java, Bali, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. This data revealed that *Al-Imam* which was published in Tanah Semenanjung Malaysia was even more spreadable in Indonesia comparing to Malaysia or Thailand. The biggest number of representative or the agent of *Al-Imam* was in West Sumatera, the origin home town of Sheikh Tahir and the place of his students Those who were conducting Islamic renewal, namely Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879-1942) in Padang Panjang, Haji Abdullah Ahmad (1878-1933) in Padang and Sheikh Jamil Jambek (1862-1947) in Bukit Tinggi; hence it understandable to why the impact of the renewal was stronger in West Sumatera comparing to other regions. (Sarwan, 2015) (Ton, 2006) The strong influence of Al-Imam in West Sumatera can be proved by the writing of Minangkabau history which is related with Al-Imam, such as writing by Hamka, (Hamka, 1982) Noer, (Noer, 1978) Mansoer, (Mansoer et al., 1970) etc. Based on this written source of history, it can be inferred that religion purification and educational modernization in West Sumatra took place in the beginning of 20th century and it has cause and effect relationship with *Kaum Muda* in Al-Imam.

Al-Imam is not an educational magazine, but educational discourse is an important issue to be revealed due to its significant impact on Islamic education modernization in Southeast Asia. The idea of the *Kaum Muda* about education in *Al-Imam* was represented in various written forms such as article, queries, news, and advertisement. These writing were grouped into three discussions, namely, *Al-Imam's* view toward science, integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge, and its implementation.

KAUM MUDA'S VIEW TOWARD SCIENCE

As the Islamic modern group, the *Kaum Muda* pays attention toward educational backwardness of Malay people in Southeast Asia. Their attention toward this issue can be recognized since

the beginning of *Al-Imam* publication in 1906 to its last publication in 1908. First, in the early publication, the *Kaum Muda* has set the magazines' motto as "science news magazine" this motto was placed in the middle of *Al-Imam* magazine front cover. Therefore, before the reader reach the content of the magazine, the reader can be well informed about the content of this magazine. Second, *Al-Imam* containing educational themes right from the very beginning to the very end of the publication. (Al-Imam, 1908m)

Education and science are two inseparable part, since science is part of educational process. In relation with science, The *Kaum Muda* thinks that science is so vital importance, (Al-Imam, 1908i) even more important than wealth, offspring, or even rank. (Al-Imam, 1908e) (Al-Imam, 1908a) (Al-Imam, 1908h) (Al-Imam, 1908e) The *Kaum Muda's* statement that science is much important can be related with four things. First Islamic value; second the function of science; third history; and the fourth facts that are happening.

Firstly, education is important since *Al-Imam* stated that Islam ask its believers to do all good deeds, (Al-Imam, 1908f) for both the world and the hereafter. (Alhady, n.d.) Referring to Sheikh Tahir who revealed that science plays important role to find out if something is good. (Jalaluddin, n.d.-b) Therefore, since knowledge is very important, it is then a must for a muslim to possess it, (Ali, 1995) and those who do will be glorified and elevated by God. (Suharsaputra, n.d.) Secondly, The *Kaum Muda* thought that science is of vital importance since science can be compared to diamonds tied with gold, (Al-Imam, 1908e) glowing or shining just like a light in the dark or like the sun shining in the truly dark night. (Al-Imam, 1906b) (Al-Imam, 1908m) Torches or sun is an imagery for science, and darkness or the very dark night is an imagery to describe poverty, stupidity, or colonization. So, science can be a solution for problems like stupidity, poverty, and colonization. Third, The *Kaum Muda* stated that, based on the experience of each nation, the one and only way for a nation to move from the backwardness and decline is to master the knowledge. (Al-Imam, 1906c) The European nation can move forward from the dark ages in the 7th AD to 17th AD to the progress nation after arrogated knowledge advancement from Muslim in Andalusia. In line with this, Al-Hadistated that Islamic value has become the foundation toward European nations' advancement and modernization. (Alhady, n.d.) Learning from the history of European nations' resurrection; hence The *Kaum Muda* is very optimistic that Muslim nations in Southeast Asia which is in decline, colonized, and suppressed can turn into an advance nation by mastering the knowledge. (Al-Imam, 1906b) Fourth, The *Kaum Muda* stated that, it is of vital importance to master knowledge since it has significant role to attain advancement. The *Kaum Muda* took the advancement attained by Western nations and Japan as the role model. They were in advance as the result of the advancement of their knowledge. Western nations have large colonized regions since they master the knowledge or science, as for Japan, although the number of their human resources was limited, however they can beat large number of other nations since they use knowledge. (Al-Imam, 1906c)

Learning from the advance nations' experience, the *Kaum Muda* was trying to alert the Malay people about the decline and colonized conditions they are experiencing as well as encourage them to pursue knowledge (Al-Imam, 1908m) since the decline or the advancement of a nation is related closely toward their mastery of knowledge or science. The progress of a nation related closely to the progress of its science, a nation can advance if its science advances (Adams, 2005) and otherwise as stated by Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) the decline of a nation is also related to the decline of its science. (Rahman, 1992) Hence, it can be concluded that the cause of Islamic world decline at that time in West Asia, Turkey, Africa, India, and Southeast Asia (Yaccob,

2007) (Faisal, 2011) also related with the decline of their knowledge, (Al-Imam, 1906a) (Al-Imam, 1906g) although, there are number of factors contributed to the decline of a nation, however, a decline or science backwardness is the prominent cause to it. (Faisal, 2011) Abduh proposed that to build a community is to build the education first. (Imarah, 1973)

The *Kaum Muda* revealed that, other than mastering the knowledge, Malay people also need to work hard and be diligent in order to achieve success. (Alhady, n.d.) Instead of taking Western nations and Japan as the long term role model, China can also be the short term role model. The *Kaum Muda* asked Malay people to learn from Chinese about persistence and diligence in life. They came to this foreign country without property, but since they were persistence and diligence, they were finally able to change their life from poverty to rich, possessing land asset, farm, housing, building, and company. Supposedly, Malay people can be the host in their very own country since The *Kaum Muda* thought that Malay people were actually equal to people from West country, Japan or China, but Malay people were lazy, arrogance, day dreaming, and belief on illogic things and neglecting the knowledge and deed. (Al-Imam, 1907) (Al-Imam, 1906b)

Laziness has become the synonym to Malay nation, this stigma has attached by the colonizer and public figures in Malay. (Mohamad, 2016) (Muhammad, 2019) They tend to show more arrogance rather than being rational, they love to day dreaming and did not rely on reality. They believed that happiness and the victory can be obtained without cause and effect. In fact, God will never change human's life unless they try to change their own life seriously. (Al-Imam, 1906e) (Al-Imam, 1906f) (Al-Imam, 1907) Malay people will be able to obtain the advancement as well as respect just like in the old day only if they try hard with all best thing they have. (Al-Imam, 1906d)

INTEGRATION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AND GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Since Islam entering Southeast Asia to the appearance of *Kaum Muda*, Islamic education institution was only taught about religious knowledge and since Western country entering this region, only general knowledge was taught at school. In response to this situation, dualism of education system; hence, *Kaum Muda* thought that:

Bukanlah kita jumlahkan daripada pelajaran-pelajaran yang dikatakan (menurut ilmu Allah) sebagaimana di pondok-pondok dan *surau* atau di serambi-serambi masjid itu tetapi yang kita maksud, yaitu pelajaran-pelajaran yang sebenar-benarnya. Islam menuntut dan memahamkan hukum-hakam dan pengetahuan-pengetahuan adab dan ketukangan, kepandaian di dalam perusahaan perniagaan dan pergaulan hidup serta ubat-ubatan juga sebagaimana yang boleh dikenali daripada tawarikh-tawarikh dan kitab-kitab pengetahuan Islam ini semenjak kezhahirannya di dalam pimpinan yang dibenarkan dan disukai oleh tuntutan agama yang sebetul-betulnya dahulu dan sekarang. (Al-Imam, 1906b)

Based on the above statement, it can be concluded that The *Kaum Muda's* view is that curriculum in the Islamic institution refers toward the integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge. In the 20th AD, there were two education models in Malaysia and Indonesia, namely, first, modern education model and second, traditional education model. Modern education model or Western education model is a secular one, in which it provides general knowledge but not religious knowledge, comparing to traditional education model in which it provides religious knowledge but not general knowledge. This Education dualism (modern and traditional) has disappointed Al-Hadi since he thinks that it is in contrast with the real Islamic education.

(Ibrahim Bin Abu Bakar, 1994) This disappointment can be understandable since these two models will resulted in imbalance human resources. One model will produce students who are able to master science and technology but have no insight of religious value as for the other model, it will produce students who are religiously insightful, but are less capable of science and technology.

In relation with the above facts, the *Kaum Muda* in *Al-Imam* magazine proposed ideas about appropriate education process in which is the combination of characteristics and intellectuality educations, so that it will resulted in a well build human resources, for both their mind and soul, (Mursi, 1977) well-build mind due to large variety science mastery and well-build soul or religiosity by fully achieving religious insight. (Alhady, n.d.) Since it is expected that a Muslim requires to a fundamental as well as intellectual individual; hence it is of vital importance for a Muslim to learn both religion and general knowledge. (Jalaluddin, n.d.-a) (Al-Imam, 1906b) By studying religion, it is expected that students will be a fundamental individual and by studying general knowledge, it is expected that students will be an intellectual individual. Finally, an intellectual as well as religious insightful individual will be resulted for both in mind and action.

The *Kaum Muda's* viewed that teacher is not merely to teach the hereafter knowledge but also to teach the knowledge about the existed world since we need both of them. (Al-Imam, 1908j) This view requires teacher to possess both religious knowledge and general knowledge. When the *Kaum Muda* encouraged Muslim to study Islamic values, the Islamic institution such as *surau*, masjid, and the house of Islamic scholars found it no problem since they already prepared this kind of curriculum. (Maimunah, 2012) However, when it comes to studying general knowledge, they found it as a problem since there were no available Islamic institution which provided general knowledge learning subject. Education institution which provided general knowledge was only the United Kingdom school located in Malaysia or Netherland school located in Indonesia. In relation with this, The *Kaum Muda* has provided short term solution, in which Muslim are allowed to learn to European nations, since they are capable of it, and they have the facility (school) to conduct teaching and learning activity. In short, since Muslim need to deal with their needs by learning about general knowledge to European nations.

The problem was, the *Kaum Muda* ideas were in contrast with common ideas amongst Muslim in Southeast Asia. They tend to forbid learning general knowledge to the colonizer school (United Kingdom and Netherland) since the teachers were not Muslim. They believed that knowledge learnt from non Muslim were not allowed according to Islamic rules. Some of them even believed that learning from non Muslim would transform the learner into a non Muslim. This kind of view was rejected by the *Kaum Muda* by providing a role model of Turkish Islamic Government (Turkish Usmani), Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II who sent his children to learn to Europe. (Jalaluddin, n.d.-a)

Azmi bin Ismail revealed that The *Kaum Muda* have opened up Muslim's mind through the basic of education, (Ismail, 2001) the *Kaum Muda* has done a paradigm renewal in the development of Muslim nations' education in which during that time most of Muslim were labeling all general knowledge from Western nations as negative. In contrast, they were thinking positively about the value of general knowledge (Dawilah, 1999) brought by Western nations to Malaysia and Indonesia in the 19th AD. (Saleh, 1980)

ISLAMIC EDUCATION RENEWAL

The United Kingdom and Netherland introduced modern educational institution in form of school to Malaysia and Indonesia, and to the Islamic scholars who owned traditional

educational institution such as *surau*, *langgar* or one's house that served as Islamic school by using old tradition. Learning in those places was focus only studying to an Islamic scholar or the teacher who owned the school himself. There were no learning supporting facilities such as chair, table, chalk, board, and so on, since both teacher and students were sitting on the floor during teaching and learning process took place. Teacher read and translated the classic religious book and the students would only taking note and asking questions.

When the Western nations brought up modern knowledge to Malaysia and Indonesia, traditional education institution take no advantage over it, even they rejected it. Every teacher in one of traditional Islamic education institution taught only one or two kinds of religious learning subject. Therefore, whenever the students were willing to master different kind of religious knowledge, they need to study from different teachers which require movement from one place to another. (Hamka, 1982) The Islamic scholars kept themselves closed from the outside world and defend their status quo, for both the knowledge they taught and the teaching methodology.

The condition of Islamic education above has motivated the *Kaum Muda* to contribute their Islamic education renewal ideas in Southeast Asia. According to Rahim Osman, the *Kaum Muda* was trying to change the pattern of education from traditional into a more modern one. (Osman, n.d.) The discussion of Islamic education renewal in *Al-Imam* magazine will be described after this: (Al-Imam, 1906a) (Al-Imam, 1906b) (Al-Imam, 1908g) (Sarif, n.d.)

First, It is to change education system of Islamic school into regular school in which the school will be accomplished with education facilities, namely, stationary, table, chair, black/whiteboard, school uniform, rules and disciplinary. Second, school needs curriculum, religious knowledge and the general knowledge. Third, school employed three languages, namely, Malay, English (in Malaysia) or Dutch (in Indonesia) and Arabic languages. There were two reasons for employing English and Dutch languages as the formal languages at school. First, It is due to pragmatism reason, in which school graduate in Malaysia and Indonesia can work for government and second, it is due to substantive reason, in which student can obtain knowledge from books with these two languages. Meanwhile, the use of Arabic language is to learn religious knowledge. Third, education process in school is up to 12 years only which is different from traditional education institution.

In short, when Muslim nations rejected everything about the colonizer (The United Kingdom and Netherland), and forbid everything with Western brand, the *Kaum Muda* acted differently. They motivated Malay people to learn knowledge brought by Western nation as well as their language (English language), without necessarily ignoring religious knowledge which was using Arabic language as the language to deliver the knowledge. (Sarif, n.d.)

Once a group of Muslim people located in Pinang Island who called themselves as "Muslim Society" planned to established a modern Islamic school and to do so was to taught religious knowledge and general knowledge by using Arabic and English language in that school, The *Kaum Muda* automatically provided their support and encouraged the realization of that education renewal, so that Malay people could be soon upgraded. (Al-Imam, 1908d) Similarly, The *Kaum Muda* also provided support toward the plan to established a kind of modern religious education institution in Singapore (Ibrahim Bin Abu Bakar, 1994) by promoting and giving information that they were also took part in that education institution called as *Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiah* (Al-Imam, 1908g) (Al-Imam, 1908k) (Al-Imam, 1908h) (Al-Imam, 1908c) (Al-Imam, 1908b) (Al-Imam, 1908l) This has

proved that The *Kaum Muda's* idea about Islamic education renewal was not only an idea, since The *Kaum Muda* realized that there will be no knowledge without learning. (Al-Imam, 1908m) The science itself can be developed within an institution.

Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiah school was only lasted for a year, and there was no any graduated students. However, its influence toward Islamic education renewal was of vital importance in Southeast Asia, such as its impact toward *Al-Hadi Madrasah* (Melaka), *Madrasah Al-Haji Taib* (Muar, Johor), *Madrasah al-Masyhoor al-Islamiyah* (Pinang Island), *Adabiah School* (Padang-Indonesia), *Diniyah School* (Padang Panjang-Indonesia) and *Thawalib School*, (Padang Panjang-Indonesia). All of those schools were modern religious school in which they were different from the concept implemented by traditional education institution. In relation with this, Rahim Osman said that the *Kaum Muda* has changed the pattern of education from traditional to a more modern pattern. (Osman, n.d.) The establishment of the *Kaum Muda's* school in Malaysia and Indonesia were originated from their ideas of education renewal as published in *Al-Imam* magazine.

Once The *Kaum Muda's* statement was connected with the Roff's assessment, it can be inferred that *Al-Imam* magazine was not only asking Malay people to learn the knowledge of the world, even more they were initialized and realized Islamic education renewal, (Roff, 1967) so that Malay people can achieved advancement since the key to the advancement itself was education system renewal. (Azra, 1999) The *Kaum Muda's* education renewal concept tend to refer to Islamic education deconstruction, in which it was to erase the dualism educational system in Muslim countries (traditional education and modern education system), by integrating both of them, an integrated education system in an Islamic modern education institution. (Ibrahim Bin Abu Bakar, 1994)

CONCLUSION

Kaum Muda Islamic scholars are community elites who first implement Islamic education renewal in Southeast Asia. Their thought has been spreaded through *Al-Imam* magazine toward Islamic scholars in Southeast Asia, particularly toward *Kaum Muda* Islamic scholars in West Sumatera. Eventhough *Kaum Muda* lived in the colonial era or in the 20th century, however their thought to improve Malay nation advancement is still relevant after the independency in the 21st century, even so the target of the progress has yet to be achieved by Malay nation, to be a step ahead or at least same as Western people. *Kaum Muda's* thought to improve science and education consists of three interrelated elements: First, they instill awareness into Malay nation about the importance of learning in order to achieve progress, since science may bring Malay nation toward progress. Second, the intended knowledge to bring improvement is the integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge or science. The goal is to achieve a balance progress of body and soul, material, mental, and spiritual. Third, the integration can only take place in a modern Islamic institution. Thus, Islamic education institution modernization is of vital importance to be implement on management, administration, and curriculum aspects in line with the times.

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