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Cultural transformation: religious moderation from manuscripts heritage to living tradition in Indonesia and Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia in fostering religious moderation amid ongoing cultural transformation. These classical texts function not only as sources of Islamic teaching but also as dynamic tools that facilitate the contextual adaptation of Islamic values within diverse local cultures. Employing a qualitative approach—combining philological analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observation (at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and in Denpasar, Bali), and digital ethnography through YouTube content—this research highlights the active role of manuscript traditions in shaping peaceful, inclusive, and culturally rooted expressions of moderate Islam. These values are embedded both in the textual contents and in their internalization within communal practices. The study identifies key cases such as gender-equitable inheritance customs, dialogues between local rulers and Islamic scholars, and the gradual Islamization of adat law, particularly in South Sulawesi's Wajo region. These cases demonstrate how Islamic teachings were historically adapted through respectful dialogue, not rigid legalism. Furthermore, the use of Malay as the lingua franca of Islamic scholarship enabled broader integration across a multicultural region. This living tradition, transmitted through both written and oral means—including digital platforms like YouTube—continues to evolve, sustaining the relevance of Islam in diverse local contexts.

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Introduction

The existence of manuscripts becomes relevant when there is a serious effort to build collective awareness about the urgency of preserving the history of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia. This effort reflects the concern of academics in universities who are trying to preserve the heritage of Malay Islamic civilization in a structured, systematic, and massive manner (Nofrizal, 2020). Without political will and collective awareness, the Muslim generation is at risk of losing their connection with Islamic history in this region, which could result in the erosion of their ethnic and religious identities. In addition, limited access to Malay Islamic manuscripts further exacerbates this situation (Sakti, 2011). For example, most Acehnese people today can no longer read Arabic Malay scripts, while many 18th and 19th century Acehnese Islamic manuscripts are stored in the British Library, London. Ironically, this limited access hinders the philological and codicological research needed to understand the history and culture of Islam in the region (Gallop & Fathurahman, 2022).

Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia are part of the intellectual heritage that stores various dimensions of religious moderation values. However, access to these manuscripts still faces various obstacles, both in terms of conservation and publication. Although their storage locations are known,

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many manuscripts have not been widely accessible to researchers for various reasons, including limited publication permits. Similar challenges were also found in research on Islamic manuscripts stored in The Egyptian Museum in Berlin, Germany (Kamal, 2022). In addition, the tarekat manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia show their own complexity, both in terms of the material and non-material meanings contained therein. In general, manuscripts in this region reflect elements of ethnicity and locality inspired by Islamic values (van der Meij, 2022). This uniqueness makes the study of Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia an important discourse in understanding the dynamics of religious moderation in Southeast Asia.

The study of religious moderation values in manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia is part of the effort to preserve authentic sources that contributed to the development of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia. The study of Islamic manuscripts does not only focus on physical conservation or scientific content, but also on building critical awareness to inherit Islamic treasures through a modern and systematic approach (Omar & Ariffin, 2023). Latiar (2018) outlines three main strategies in manuscript preservation, namely (1) preservation, namely protection of the physical aspects of manuscripts, (2) consolidation, namely strengthening the durability and longevity of manuscripts, and (3) reproduction, which aims to increase copies of original manuscripts. Given the diversity and high value of knowledge in Islamic manuscripts in Southeast Asia, manuscript-based studies are needed that are able to maintain and utilize this intellectual heritage (Maulani, 2023). Indonesia and Malaysia have a rich collection of manuscripts with religious moderation values, but they have not been studied comprehensively (Omar et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the actualization and preservation of manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia in order to reveal the legacy of the values of civilization based on religious moderation contained therein.

This study aims to build collective and critical awareness of the actualization of religious moderation values contained in manuscripts as part of the transformation of life and *living tradition* that persists in the disruptive era. In the short term, this study seeks to identify and analyze the values of religious moderation in Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia, and explore their relevance in the contemporary socio-religious context. In the long term, this study is expected to strengthen cross-cultural and religious understanding through the study of manuscripts, as well as encourage the integration of religious moderation values in the education system and social policy. Thus, this study not only contributes to preserving the intellectual heritage of Islam, but also in forming a more inclusive, tolerant, and harmony-oriented society.

This paper has academic significance in studying religious moderation in manuscripts as a *living tradition* and part of *cultural transformation* in Indonesian and Malaysian society. Conceptually, religious moderation contained in manuscripts is not merely a legacy of past texts, but also has relevance in forming an inclusive and contextual understanding of religion in the modern era (Bruckmayr, 2019). As part of a living tradition, the values of moderation in manuscripts continue to be inherited and actualized in the social practices of society. In addition, cultural transformation through manuscripts also shows how society can adapt to the challenges of the times without losing its spiritual and cultural roots (Riwarung, 2021). Therefore, opening wider academic access to this manuscript is very important so that studies on religious moderation can develop, as well as become a reference in building social harmony and strengthening cross-cultural and religious dialogue in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Literature review

Changes in cultural heritage preservation are not limited to physical aspects such as buildings and sites, but also encompass ancient manuscripts as knowledge artifacts that reflect the social, cultural, and spiritual values of a community. In this context, transforming the understanding of manuscripts becomes crucial, as these texts represent cosmology, ethics, educational systems, and collective memory (Makhloufi, 2024). Therefore, manuscript preservation must integrate material conservation with the recognition of intangible values as dynamic elements that continue to live on. This process serves as a strategic step in ensuring cultural sustainability and renegotiating the meaning of heritage in the present context.

Building on this, the concept of *living tradition* offers further insight into how cultural values endure and evolve over time. *Living tradition* refers to the continuous practice of exploring meaning and

identity derived from the principles found in manuscripts, through an ongoing and contextual process of reflection within real-life settings (McNabb & Fennell, 2019). The principal difference between *cultural transformation* and *living tradition* lies in the orientation and function of change. *Cultural transformation* emphasizes structural shifts involving the adaptation of institutions, values, and traditional practices to modernity in a comprehensive manner, reflecting broader processes of cultural adaptation (Rao, 2002). In contrast, *living tradition* focuses on the continuity of inherited cultural practices, where traditional elements remain alive and relevant through the reinterpretation and integration of new meanings into everyday life. Thus, while *cultural transformation* is systemic in nature, *living tradition* is organic and deeply rooted in communal practice.

Expanding the discussion into contemporary socio-cultural dynamics, the study of *cultural transformation* also intersects with the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia and Malaysia. Religious moderation plays a vital role in shaping social identity and managing cultural diversity in both nations. A study by Lutfi (2020) highlights how the values of religious moderation are embedded in social, artistic, and cultural practices, reflecting the harmony between religious beliefs and local traditions. Similarly, Ulum and Tuhri (2022) emphasize that religious moderation in Indonesia and Malaysia not only strengthens social cohesion but also cultivates citizens who are critically engaged and cosmopolitan in outlook. In the broader context of globalization, religious moderation becomes a crucial instrument for fostering tolerance and interfaith dialogue (Subchi et al., 2022).

Through this integrative approach, Indonesian and Malaysian societies demonstrate that religious moderation can act as a transformative force—enhancing social resilience and contributing significantly to religious stability and societal advancement. Ultimately, this affirms the role of religious moderation as a foundational element for an inclusive and sustainable civilization.

Indonesia and Malaysia face complex challenges in maintaining an inclusive space of tolerance and religiosity. A study by Qoumas et al. (2024) shows that social fragmentation due to the polarization of religious ideology can hinder cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. As the space for tolerance narrows, society's ability to understand differences is increasingly eroded (Afwadzi et al., 2024). In this situation, classical Islamic manuscripts owned by Indonesia and Malaysia become a source of wisdom that can inspire social harmony. (Levy, 2020) research highlights that historical texts contain values of moderation that can be adapted in a contemporary context to strengthen social harmony. Therefore, re-excavating values from historical manuscripts and sharing them widely is a strategic step in building collective awareness. Thus, the use of this intellectual heritage can become an ideological foundation for the actualization of religious moderation and strengthening social cohesion in a multidimensional society.

Religious moderation has become an integral aspect of cultural transformation in promoting peaceful expressions of Islam in Indonesia. Various institutions and community groups have played key roles in mainstreaming religious moderation through policy-making and educational initiatives (Ward, 2005). However, this campaign has rarely drawn upon religious literacy grounded in the rich intellectual heritage of classical Islamic scholarship. This gap is due to several factors, including: (1) limited access to, and competence in, understanding traditional Islamic teachings that emphasize moderation; and (2) the absence of academic and public spaces that facilitate the internalization of these values into lived social practices (Mesoudi, 2021). In reality, traditional Islamic teachings remain highly relevant in contemporary contexts where society increasingly seeks authentic and trustworthy religious guidance. Therefore, integrating these teachings into the cultural transformation of religious moderation represents a vital step toward fostering social harmony rooted in inclusive Islamic traditions.

In light of this need for deeper engagement with Islamic intellectual heritage, recent efforts in manuscript preservation offer a promising pathway. In 2017, the Leipzig Manuscript Centre conducted an in-depth study of medieval manuscript fragments, yielding significant scientific insights into the preservation of manuscript heritage (Dobcheva & Mackert, 2018). More than 800 fragments were analyzed, offering a progressive account of the intellectual and cultural developments of the period. However, without systematic preservation strategies, the invaluable knowledge contained in these manuscripts—including those relevant to Islamic civilization—risks being permanently lost. The erosion of access to such manuscripts not only limits academic inquiry but also endangers the collective historical memory of the Muslim community (Habib et al., 2024).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore the findings of the Leipzig Manuscript Centre as a means of contextualizing dimensions of religious moderation found in Islamic manuscripts within the Southeast Asian context, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. In doing so, this study seeks to contribute to both the preservation and the meaningful application of manuscript-based knowledge as a foundational source for understanding and advancing the values of religious moderation.

The study of manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia is a key element in actualizing the values of religious moderation in the study of Islamic civilization in Southeast Asia. Research on these manuscripts is not only aimed at understanding the structure of knowledge about religious moderation, but also to reveal other religious values that developed in them (Chaniago et al., 2023). One of the important figures in the study of Islamic manuscripts is Hans Daiber, who in his work *From the Greeks to the Arabs and Beyond* opens new insights into the socio-cultural context of Islamic manuscripts. Daiber integrates cross-cultural thought studies with Islamic intellectual traditions, thus providing a broader perspective in understanding classical texts (Daiber, 2022). These findings form the basis for further research related to the management of the preservation of Islamic manuscripts. Therefore, this study aims to identify the procedures for handling Islamic manuscripts, as well as provide a conceptual framework for future studies on the interpretation and conservation of Islamic manuscripts in Southeast Asia.

In 2014, the University of Leipzig housed an Islamic manuscript of *Kitāb al-Zīna* by the Ismaili Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (933–934). This manuscript is physical evidence of one of the oldest copies of the book owned by the university and shows an unusual text structure compared to other Islamic manuscripts (Berthold, 2014). This uniqueness has attracted the attention of researchers to study not only the contents of the manuscript but also the preservation systems of Islamic manuscripts applied in various countries, including Indonesia and Malaysia (Alrawashdeh & Alrawashdeh, 2021). Although there are fundamental differences in the methods of manuscript preservation in various parts of the world, international cooperation is key to building a broader manuscript preservation network. With an interdisciplinary approach and global academic collaboration, the scientific community can exchange experiences in maintaining, studying, and preserving Islamic manuscripts as part of the world's civilizational heritage {Formatting Citation}.

Exploring the ideas of religious moderation found in manuscripts is a vital effort to understand the foundational principles of Islamic knowledge that respond comprehensively to the reality of religious and cultural plurality (Akhmadi, 2022). Philology, as the discipline dedicated to the study of manuscripts—particularly in the contexts of Indonesia and Malaysia—plays a crucial role in uncovering historical and cultural insights from the past (Mojopahit, 2022). This approach also enhances the relevance of Islamic heritage texts, both classical and contemporary, in addressing present-day challenges (González-Muñoz, 2020). Manuscripts, therefore, are not merely historical relics but function as strategic tools in building social resilience against radicalism and religious fundamentalism. Furthermore, they contribute to shaping more peaceful ways of living and serve as intellectual fortresses against the threats posed by global terrorism (Rasidin et al., 2021). In this regard, the actualization of religious moderation through manuscript literacy in Southeast Asia plays a significant role in reinforcing religious solidarity and cultivating the values of religious democracy within Muslim communities.

Building upon the significance of manuscripts in promoting religious moderation, the inspection and management of Islamic manuscripts provide a deeper understanding of both their material and immaterial dimensions. This process is essential for tracing historical developments in Islamic scholarship, particularly as it draws from authentic sources dating back to the Middle Ages. Islamic manuscripts exist in diverse forms, including unconventional media. For instance, amulets or necklaces collected by European collectors often bear inscriptions that serve as important historical artifacts. The National Library of Russia (NLR) in St. Petersburg, for example, preserves a collection of Islamic amulets originating from Kurdish communities, written in Arabic and Persian (Omarkhali, 2022). Similarly, ownership seals—such as that of ‘Abd al-Bāqī Ibn al-‘Arabī from the medieval period—provide insight into the cataloging and inventory practices of Islamic literature during the Ottoman Caliphate, beginning in 1517. One such seal, now housed in the Cairo Library, underscores the importance of ownership documentation in the broader framework of manuscript preservation (Liebrenz, 2022).

The intellectual tradition contained in the manuscripts is part of a living tradition that continues to develop and adapt to changing times. However, we never know when the situation will change

drastically—a revolution, invasion, or conflict could suddenly make access to manuscripts impossible. In such conditions, manuscripts containing the values of religious moderation are at risk of being destroyed or lost forever (Aidulsyah & Hakam, 2022). Therefore, universities strive to make as many preservation efforts as possible in the time available, before loss becomes a reality. The digitization and research project on these manuscripts is not only about preserving the texts, but also ensuring that the values of religious moderation contained in them can continue to be inherited and actualized (Muqtada, 2022). Indonesia and Malaysia have very old roots in the values of religious moderation, but due to various historical factors, this tradition has become less well-known in the Western world. In fact, this tradition has developed with a unique character, has a strong influence on society, and has formed an extraordinary culture of religious moderation.

The preservation of religious moderation values in Indonesian and Malaysian manuscripts may have initially been driven by academic interest in exploring aspects that had not been widely studied. However, it was soon realized that these manuscripts contained a wealth of culture and literacy of religious moderation that was much broader than mere academic study (Ardiyanti & Christomy, 2020). This shows that the preservation of manuscripts is not only about preserving ancient texts, but also maintaining the continuity of a nation's history, culture, and identity so that it remains alive for future generations. The main threat to culture is not merely globalization, but modernity that has the potential to shift the continuity of certain traditions. Therefore, a commitment from universities with religious, cultural, and social orientations is needed to ensure that these values remain relevant (Zakiyah, 2016). Universities, as non-profit educational institutions, play an important role in reflecting the philosophy of humanity, cultural diversity, and social harmony through the preservation of manuscripts as part of a living tradition.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine the preservation of Islamic manuscripts and the internalization of religious moderation values in Indonesia and Malaysia. The study employs a combination of philological analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography, aiming to capture both the textual and contextual dimensions of manuscript traditions and their role in shaping moderate Islamic discourse.

The selection of research materials in this study is based on three main criteria: (1) thematic relevance to the discourse on cultural transformation and religious moderation in Indonesian and Malaysian Islamic traditions; (2) representativeness and historical value, reflecting diverse geographic origins, languages, and Islamic approaches; and (3) data authenticity and accessibility, focusing only on officially documented manuscripts from verified archives (e.g. Leiden University Library, The British Library) and credible academic or institutional digital sources. These criteria ensure the scholarly integrity and contextual depth of the analysis. The ethical considerations in this study encompass informed consent, respect for cultural and religious sensitivities, and the responsible use of digital content and artificial intelligence (AI). All informants were interviewed with prior consent. Data collection was conducted with careful attention to local contexts, avoiding any offense to sacred values. YouTube content was selected from open-access academic channels and appropriately attributed. ChatGPT was used transparently as a writing support tool, without processing any sensitive or personal data.

Research was conducted in three main locations:

1. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) – a regional hub for Islamic manuscript studies and philological research in Southeast Asia,
2. Denpasar City, Bali – representing a plural and multicultural setting where religious moderation is practiced in daily life, and
3. Kuala Lumpur – as a center of urban Islamic discourse and manuscript digitization initiatives.

In addition to on-site observations and academic interactions, the study integrates digital platforms—notably YouTube—as part of its data sources. Channels that regularly publish webinars, public lectures, panel discussions, and manuscript interpretation sessions from both Malaysia and Indonesia were

systematically reviewed. These digital materials are treated as legitimate sources of public scholarship and offer contemporary reflections on how classical Islamic texts are being contextualized and popularized.

The study also draws on specific manuscript sources, including:

1. OR 83999 – Leiden University Library: A trilingual manuscript (Arabic, Persian, and interlinear Malay) linked to the Mandailing community of North Sumatra, dated between the late 17th and early 19th centuries. It reflects multilingual Islamic scholarship and vernacular interpretations.
2. MS 1616 – Leiden University Library: A 1581 Arabic grammar manuscript discovered in Batavia, written on Javanese baros (luang) paper, indicating local production. It is a Persian-Malay translation of *Mi'yār al-'Arabiyyah*, showing transregional textual mobility.
3. Codex 507056 – Leiden University Library: A Qur'anic tafsir manuscript believed to originate from Aceh or Pidie (15th–17th century), featuring Persian-Malay poetic commentary with ancient Jawi script.
4. Manuscripts from South Sulawesi (Indonesia): Including *Lontaraq Sukkuna Wajo*, *Lontaraq Akkarungeng Wajo*, and others documented in microfilms by Mukhlis Paeni and The British Library in the 1990s. These texts record socio-legal practices (e.g. inheritance laws, local sharia adaptation) and embody a living tradition of moderation, dialogue, and legal-cultural negotiation.

Data collection was conducted over a nine-month period (January–September 2024) using methods such as:

1. Semi-structured interviews with academic experts in philology and codicology (particularly at UKM and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang), as well as community members and manuscript custodians in Denpasar and Kuala Lumpur.
2. Participant observation in academic settings and everyday religious life.
3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and formal meetings at UKM and online via Zoom.
4. Analysis of digital content on YouTube, including manuscript readings and discussions by Malaysian and Indonesian scholars.

Snowball sampling was used to identify expert informants with specific expertise in Islamic manuscript studies. This technique began with two key scholars—one at UKM and one at UIN Malang—who then referred additional informants. To enhance analytical rigor, the study also employed ChatGPT as an AI-supported research assistant for refining arguments, exploring thematic connections, and generating comparative insights across datasets.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which consists of:

1. Data reduction – selecting relevant data from interviews, field notes, manuscript content, and digital recordings,
2. Data display – organizing the information into a structured narrative matrix,
3. Conclusion drawing – identifying emerging themes and patterns related to religious moderation and textual adaptation.

To ensure validity, triangulation was applied by comparing textual sources (e.g. manuscripts), contextual fieldwork (e.g. community perspectives), and virtual data (e.g. YouTube scholarly content). This integrated strategy ensures a comprehensive, multilayered understanding of how Islamic manuscripts continue to inform and shape the values of religious moderation in Southeast Asia today.

Results

The diverse physical attributes of Malaysian manuscripts illustrate a dynamic cultural transformation, as communities adapted materials and forms to suit changing environmental and historical contexts.

Simultaneously, the sustained use of Jawi script reflects the continuity of living tradition through adaptive expressions of inherited religious and intellectual practices.

The physical characteristics of Malaysian manuscripts show the diversity of forms and materials used. Based on data from the National Library in 2002, these manuscripts are generally found in book form with various basic materials, ranging from natural materials such as palm leaves to artificial materials such as paper. The size and thickness also vary, indicating the existence of adaptive manufacturing standards to the needs and availability of materials at that time. The following table explains the general condition of Malaysian manuscripts:

From Table 1 above, it shows that Malaysian manuscripts have certain standards in the selection of basic materials and physical form. In terms of physical form, Malaysian manuscripts vary. Some are in the form of books, scrolls, or pieces. The basic materials used also vary, ranging from easily found materials such as paper and palm leaves, to more exotic materials such as ivory, wood, animal skin, and tree bark. The components of a manuscript generally consist of a front cover, inside pages, and back cover. The size of the manuscript paper also varies, ranging from large to small. The thickness of the manuscript also varies, ranging from 0.3 cm to 3 cm.

A significant finding from the YouTube channel *School of Gilding and Ornamentation* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyIncV0UNh8>), featuring Dr. Annabel Gallop, the Lead Curator for Southeast Asian Collections at the British Library, highlights the relatively unexplored nature of Southeast Asian manuscripts, particularly Malay and Indonesian manuscripts. Dr. Gallop emphasizes that this under-researched field allows scholars to ‘own’ and develop specific topics. Her research on Malay diplomatic letters—of which the British Library holds an extensive collection—demonstrates this. While the textual content of these letters has been studied, Dr. Gallop points out that the material aspects—such as illumination, paper type, header design, calligraphy style, and seals—remain largely neglected, offering rich potential for further scholarly exploration.

Field data obtained from both direct interviews and digital ethnography—particularly the *Podcast Santri* episode titled *Moderasi Beragama Berbasis Manuskrip di Sulawesi Selatan* (Rezki & Husnul Fahimah Ilyas, As’adiyah Channel)—revealed a structured effort to identify and analyze Islamic manuscripts in ten districts of South Sulawesi: Wajo, Parepare, Pangkep, Sinjai, Sidrap, Maros, Gowa, Luwu, and two additional areas not publicly disclosed. The study, conducted by the Research and Development Team on Heritage and Organizational Management under the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, confirmed that these areas are ‘manuscript pockets’ with a high density of localized religious texts. This observation aligns with data recorded in the *Katalog Naskah Sulawesi Selatan*, which documented over 4,000 manuscripts preserved through microfilm. The research demonstrates that these manuscripts not only serve as textual repositories but also as cultural instruments for internalizing religious moderation through their narrative, legal, and theological content.

Furthermore, digital records and transcripts of the podcast clarify that many of these manuscripts reflect *adaptive theological engagements* between Islamic principles and local customs, particularly in themes such as inheritance laws (*masama waé*), gender justice, and local sharia enforcement. The archival and digitalized manuscripts, preserved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs between 2008 and 2017, have become key references in tracing the intellectual genealogy of religious moderation in Eastern Indonesia. The research team utilized a *thematic tafsir approach*, mapping classical manuscript values onto contemporary issues. From this method, researchers identified explicit content in several texts—especially *Lontaraq Sukkuna Wajo* and *Akkarungeng Wajo*—that illustrate dialogical models of religious adaptation, showing that religious moderation is not a recent political slogan, but a deeply rooted cultural praxis. The physical and thematic attributes of Islamic manuscripts in South Sulawesi demonstrate that these texts function not merely as historical artifacts but as instruments of cultural transformation, wherein Islamic principles are dialogically adapted to local values. Through narrative continuity and locally recognized cultural authority, these manuscripts sustain a living tradition that actively reinforces religious moderation in contemporary contexts. This evidence supports the view that Islamic manuscripts in South Sulawesi are living documents that continue to shape modern religious tolerance through narrative continuity and local legitimacy, as shown in Table 2 below.

The Wajo community of South Sulawesi provides a remarkable example of how Islamic values are deeply intertwined with local customs through the preservation of manuscript traditions and social

Table 1. General condition of Malaysian manuscripts.

Category	Data	Category	Data
Physical Form	Books, scrolls, pieces	Type of Writing	Jawi (adaptation of the Arabic alphabet)
Basic material	Paper, palm leaves, bamboo, ivory, wood, cloth, animal skin, tree bark	Area of Use	Malay World (including Indonesia and Malaysia)
Component	Front cover, inside pages, back cover	Period of Use	Since the 13th century AD until now (with various developments)
Paper Size	34 × 43 cm, 21 × 17 cm, 11 × 17 cm	Main Functions	Writing Malay
Thickness	0.3 cm to 3 cm	Oldest Evidence	Inscribed stone in Kuala Berang, Terengganu (702 Hijriah/1303 AD)

Source: Documentation study at the National Library of Malaysia.

Table 2. Religious moderation based on manuscripts in South Sulawesi.

District/city	Types of manuscripts found	Main content	Reflected values of religious moderation
Wajo	Religious texts, customary law, Sufi orders	Local Qur'anic interpretation, inheritance law, governance system	Balance between religion and custom; social tolerance
Parepare	Sufi treatises and Friday sermons	Social ethics, moral conduct, communal harmony	Dissemination of peaceful values, gentle preaching (da'wah)
Pangkep	Sufi manuscripts and genealogies	Teacher-student relationships, local spirituality	Hierarchical devotion and sectarian tolerance
Sinjai	Theology ('aqidah), Islamic law (fiqh), local Islamic history	Explanation of faith without coercion, history of local Muslim community	Inter-traditional dialogue; cross-sectarian understanding
Sidrap	Religious poetry, Islamic hikayat	Moral education through folklore	Da'wah through peaceful narratives and local culture
Maros	Islamic calendars, astrology, worship guides	Relationship between science and religion	Rational Islam open to scientific inquiry
Gowa	Islamic kingdom chronicles and royal letters	Interethnic and interreligious tolerance in governance	Inclusive leadership, unity in diversity
Luwu	Sufi texts and spiritual wisdom	Spiritual counsel and interfaith relations	Local wisdom in addressing social differences

practices. The Wajo tradition reveals that physical and narrative elements of manuscripts—such as the Lontaraq—serve as dynamic instruments for cultural transformation, where Islamic legal and theological principles are adapted through dialogical engagement with local customs and philosophies. This synthesis sustains a living tradition, in which the values of justice, gender equality, and religious coexistence are continually reaffirmed through both textual transmission and evolving communal practices. This analysis outlines key elements from Wajo's cultural and religious heritage that reflect contextual transformations of Islamic principles, particularly regarding justice, gender equity, and interfaith dialogue. The Table 3 below presents six dimensions of moderation as evident in Wajo's historical and contemporary practices:

This case from Wajo illustrates that religious moderation is not merely a modern discourse, but a long-standing cultural process. The legacy of Islamic manuscripts, local philosophies, and historical dialogues shows how Islam has been indigenized through peaceful negotiation, mutual respect, and an enduring commitment to justice and coexistence. As such, Wajo represents a vibrant example of *living tradition* where Islamic law and local wisdom continuously shape one another in pursuit of a balanced and tolerant society.

Three pillars of manuscript-based religious moderation

The study of Islamic manuscripts in South Sulawesi reveals that the values of religious moderation are not recent innovations, but deeply rooted traditions cultivated over generations. These values are structured around three interrelated pillars—*conceptual*, *practical*, and *structural*—which together form a comprehensive framework for understanding how moderation is embedded in the religious and cultural life of the community. The physical and linguistic features of South Sulawesi manuscripts—such as the use of regional languages and poetic forms—function as cultural vessels that preserve and transmit the

Table 3. Analysis of religious moderation values in the wajo tradition.

Aspect	Description of practice/narrative	Value transformation	Indicators of religious moderation
Inheritance System (<i>Ma'bagi Tonrong</i>)	Equal division of inheritance, known as 'house for bicycle' system	Adjustment of 2:1 sharia principle into functional justice based on local benefit (<i>maṣlaḥah</i>)	Adaptation of Islamic law to community-based social values
Local Expression (<i>Ma'juj emak pun raya mallempa burané</i>)	Philosophy of justice and flexibility in inheritance distribution	Promotes a fair role for women, not subordinate	Gender justice within the intersection of custom and sharia
Principle in Manuscript (<i>Masama waé urané namakkunauraya</i>)	Analogy: water in a container always levels out	Indigenous teaching of equality reinterpreted through monotheistic (<i>tawhid</i>) ethics	Harmonious integration of adat and Islamic values
Islamization Process by Datuk Sulaiman	Dialogues with Arung Matoa Lasangkuru on <i>Dewata Seuwaé</i> and Islamic monotheism	Alignment of the local divine concept with the Islamic notion of God	Dialogical Islamization, free of coercion
Islamization via Power (1805, Sayyid Sheikh Abdurrahman)	Formal dissemination of sharia through royal authority	Institutionalization of Islam while respecting indigenous heritage	Strengthening Islamic values without erasing local identity
Role of Manuscripts (<i>Lontaraq</i>)	Documentation of justice, spirituality, and custom	<i>Lontaraq</i> serves as a medium of Islamic and cultural transformation	Manuscripts as spaces of convergence between religion and culture

conceptual, practical, and structural foundations of religious moderation. These attributes reflect an ongoing living tradition, where manuscript-based knowledge integrates Islamic ethics with local wisdom to shape inclusive norms, harmonious governance, and socially embedded religious practices. The table below outlines each pillar with relevant examples found in the manuscript-based research:

These manuscripts serve as powerful evidence that religious moderation has long been an integral part of the community's intellectual and spiritual landscape—long before the state began to promote it as national policy. The values are conveyed through:

1. Philosophical local languages,
2. Peaceful dialogue between tradition and religion,
3. Inclusive social policies,
4. And pragmatic practices aligned with the social fabric of the people.

This manuscript-based model of moderation shows that religious understanding rooted in local wisdom offers sustainable pathways toward peaceful coexistence and pluralism in Southeast Asia today. To obtain a more comprehensive picture, this study also analyzes the condition of manuscripts from Malaysia that are currently stored in Indonesia. One example studied is the manuscript by Muhammad Ya'kub bin Syekh Faqih Ali al-Malibari found in Bali. Table 4 presents detailed data on the physical condition of the manuscript, including material aspects, level of damage, and environmental factors that affect its preservation. A comparison between this manuscript and similar manuscripts still in Malaysia provides deeper insight into the influence of climate, storage methods, and conservation interventions carried out in both countries. The results of the study show that differences in the physical condition of the manuscripts are greatly influenced by factors such as humidity, temperature, and the restoration methods applied. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of more uniform conservation standards at the regional level to ensure the sustainability of the Islamic intellectual heritage contained in these manuscripts.

Based on Table 5 above, specific information is obtained about a particular manuscript found in Bali. The physical attributes of the Malaysian manuscript found in Bali—such as its large size, the use of Naskhi script, and the orderly layout—reflect a deliberate intellectual effort to transmit structured and aesthetically mindful Islamic knowledge, while also highlighting the transregional scholarly networks within the Malay Archipelago. In the context of cultural transformation and living tradition, the manuscript's damaged condition and missing sections serve as compelling evidence of the urgent need for sustainable regional conservation policies to safeguard the Islamic intellectual heritage that continues to shape communal life to this day. This manuscript has several interesting characteristics to discuss: The authorship of this manuscript was written by two people, namely Muhammad Ya'kub bin Syekh Faqih

Table 4. Three pillars of religious moderation in South Sulawesi manuscripts.

Pillar	Description	Examples from the study
Conceptual	Religious and customary narratives that reflect justice, tolerance, and balance	<i>Masama waé</i> philosophy, theological dialogues, religious poetry
Practical	Implementation of moderate values in social and cultural practices	Equal inheritance system, reforms on modesty (aurat), elimination of sacred animist rituals
Structural/Social	Formal support from traditional leaders and religious scholars through policy	<i>Redifa</i> (royal decree), <i>qisas</i> (Islamic penal law), Islamic-oriented customary laws

Table 5. Condition of Malaysian manuscripts in Bali.

Category	Data	Manuscript image
Author	Muhammad Ya'kub bin Sheikh Faqih Ali al-Malibari	
Size	30 x 20 x 6 cm (overall), 20 x 12.5 cm (writing area)	
Physical Condition	Some damaged and torn, there is a green cover	
Completeness	The first five juz are missing, the final part does not reach the colophon.	
Layout	15 lines per page	
Ink	Black	
Khat	Naskhi	

Source: <https://tafsiralquran.id/author/zainal-abidin/>.

Ali al-Malibari. This indicates the influence of the Islamic world in the spread of knowledge in the Nusantara region, including Bali. This manuscript has a fairly large size, namely 30 x 20 x 6 cm overall, with a writing area measuring 20 x 12.5 cm. This fairly large size indicates that this manuscript contains a fairly long text or may be a collection of writings. This manuscript is in poor condition. Some parts are damaged and torn, and there is a green cover. In addition, the first five juz of this manuscript are missing and the final part does not reach the colophon (the final part of the manuscript containing information about the author, copyist, and others). This condition indicates that this manuscript has been damaged due to age or poor handling. The writing in this manuscript is arranged in 15 lines per page. This orderly layout shows that the author or copyist of the manuscript paid great attention to aesthetics and readability. The ink used in this manuscript is black. Black is the ink color commonly used in ancient manuscripts. The writing on this manuscript uses Naskhi khat. Khat Naskhi is a type of khat in Arabic writing which is famous for its simple and easy to read form.

Findings from the *School of Gilding and Ornamentation* channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyIncV0UNh8>), through the insights of Dr. Annabel Gallop—Lead Curator of the Southeast Asia Collections at the British Library—highlight the significance of visual elements in identifying the provenance of manuscripts. Citing Elaine Wright's dissertation *The Look of the Book*, Gallop observes that the physical appearance of books is deeply shaped by cultural contexts. In Arabic-script manuscripts, regional differences may be detected through subtle features such as paper color, letter slant, margins, and especially illumination. Even undecorated manuscripts carry visual traditions unique to their local cultures, reflecting how a society envisions the form of a book. Gallop emphasizes that opening a manuscript is akin to entering a different world, where visual literacy becomes key to uncovering cultural identity.

In the seventh lecture of the *Malay Manuscript Lecture Series* hosted by The Official IIUM Library, D.C.M. offered a reflective interpretation of Malay manuscripts as expressions of continuity between thought, civilization, and nature. He highlighted that classical Eastern literary traditions—such as *pantun*, *syair*, *seloka*, and reciprocal verse (*balas pantun*)—contain symbols that reveal a philosophical relationship between human beings and the natural world, as well as between history and sustainability. History, in this context, is perceived as a continuum, with each era building upon the legacy of the previous one. The concept of *shajarah* (tree) was evoked as a metaphor of continuity, where roots and branches symbolize the transmission of values and life. Furthermore, D.C.M. emphasized a fundamental distinction between classical literature and the modern novel: while the protagonist in modern literature

often stands as a static, individualistic 'I', characters in classical texts are embedded within collective values and temporal continuity. Rather than asserting individual autonomy, the classical persona dissolves into the communal fabric of its era.

The manuscripts studied in Malaysia provide in-depth insights into the development of Islamic thought in the region. These works not only reflect the scholars' understanding of the concept of religious moderation, but also show how these teachings were adapted to the social and cultural contexts of the local community. Analysis of these texts reveals the evolving intellectual dynamics, including external influences and scholars' responses to changing times. The findings of this study indicate that Islamic manuscripts in Malaysia play an important role in shaping moderate and inclusive religious understanding. Furthermore, efforts to preserve and digitize manuscripts are crucial aspects in maintaining the continuity of Islamic intellectual heritage. With increased access to manuscripts through digitization, it is hoped that studies on these texts can continue to develop, enriching the global body of Islamic scholarship, and strengthening academic relations between researchers in various countries.

Islamic manuscripts function as a historical window that opens insight into religious moderation in the past. In Malaysia, a number of manuscripts have been documented and catalogued, including those discussing aspects of religious moderation. Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani, a great Islamic scholar from Malaysia, has made a significant contribution to the thinking of religious moderation in this region. One of his interesting thoughts is regarding the identity and characteristics of the Malay people. In his writings translated by Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani provides an in-depth view of the unity, geography, language and character of the Malay nation. Through analysis of the quotation below, we can understand more about how scholars in the past saw and defined the identity of the Malay nation. This is revealed in Table 6 below:

Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani's thoughts about the Malay nation provide a rich picture of the identity and characteristics of the Malaysian nation at that time. He highlighted the importance of unity among the entire Malay nation, and underlined the uniqueness of the Malay language and character. Even though it was written several centuries ago, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani's thoughts are still relevant today and can be an inspiration for efforts to strengthen the unity and identity of the Malay nation. Understanding the historical roots and identity of a nation is very important in building a better future. The physical and linguistic features of Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani's manuscripts—such as their use of accessible Malay language and detailed ethnolinguistic descriptions—reflect a conscious effort to preserve cultural identity while promoting inclusive communication across diverse communities. This synthesis of intellectual clarity and cultural sensitivity embodies both cultural transformation, through the articulation of national consciousness, and living tradition, through the continued relevance of his moderate and unifying vision for the Malay world.

M.H.A.M., an anthropologist from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, offers an in-depth perspective on religious moderation in Malaysia. As an academic who is active in research and teaching on religious and social issues, her views are influenced by her personal experiences growing up in a multicultural environment. In an in-depth interview, M.H.A.M. emphasized that religious moderation is a key element in maintaining harmony in Malaysia, given the country's complex religious and cultural diversity. She also highlighted the challenges faced, such as increasing social polarization and the role of education in

Table 6. Religious moderation in sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani's manuscripts.

Malay/Malaysian text quotes	Free Indonesian translation
The unity of all Malays, al-Malayuwiah is the ratio for Malays with the bottom row (kasrah) of the letter mim, or the top row (fathah) and the front row (dhammah) of the letter ya. They are a group or a large group of humans. Their countries are the most fertile countries in the world, located between India and China, consisting of mostly scattered islands ... The Hijaz/Arab people, apart from them, call them Malays and the nations in that region are called Javanese, that is, one group of people on a large island there. They are not Malay.	The unity of all Malay people, al-Malayuwiah is a comparison of Malay people with the bottom row (kasrah) of the letter mim, or the top row (fathah) and the front row (dhammah) of the letter ya. They are a group or large group of people. Their country is as fertile as any other country in the world, located between India and China, consisting of many scattered islands ... The Hijaz/Arab people and other people call the Malays and the nations in that region Javanese, which is one of the human groups on a large island there. They are not Malays.
Malay is the lightest (easiest) language of the people of those regions. That's why most Hijaz people use Malay in interacting with these nations, whose language is different from Malay. The Malay people are sincere, gentle, soft, and have a good attitude	Malay is the easiest language (simple) for the people in the area. That is why most of the people of Hijaz use Malay in interacting with those nations, whose languages are different from Malay. Malays are sincere, gentle, soft, polite ...

reinforcing moderate values. One concrete example she shared was the experience of her own family, who came from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds but still lived side by side in harmony. This experience reinforced her belief that mutual respect and understanding are important foundations for social stability in Malaysia.

According to M.H.A.M., education plays a key role in instilling the values of religious moderation. The school curriculum in Malaysia has included materials that teach the importance of interfaith tolerance and respect for differences. In addition, interfaith dialogue is also actively carried out to strengthen understanding and tolerance between religious communities. M.H.A.M. also highlighted the difference between the concepts of religious moderation and religious moderation. Although both concepts have the same goal, namely creating harmony between religious communities, there are differences in their emphasis. Religious moderation focuses more on the attitudes and behavior of individuals in interacting with followers of other religions, while religious moderation emphasizes more on the interpretation of the teachings of the religion itself.

Regarding the Differences between Religious Moderation and Religious Moderation: Challenges and Implementation, M.H.A.M. explained that although often used interchangeably, the concepts of religious moderation and religious moderation have quite significant differences. Religious moderation refers more to the practice or way we apply religious teachings in everyday life, especially in the context of a multicultural society. Meanwhile, religious moderation refers more to the interpretation of the religious teachings themselves. According to M.H.A.M., religion itself cannot be moderated, but the way we understand and practice religion can be adjusted to the context of the times and society. Religious moderation, in this case, is important to form a mindset and behavior that is tolerant, respects differences, and lives side by side harmoniously with adherents of other religions.

On the issue of challenges in implementing religious moderation, M.H.A.M. admitted that in implementing religious moderation, of course there are various challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the fast and easy dissemination of information through social media. Inaccurate information or even hoaxes can easily spread and trigger divisions in society. In addition, the existence of extreme groups that try to use religion for certain interests is also a serious challenge. Despite the challenges, M.H.A.M. saw a positive response from the Malaysian people to the religious moderation program. Many people realize the importance of living side by side peacefully and respecting diversity. However, it cannot be denied that there are still groups in society who are skeptical or even reject the concept of religious moderation.

Cultural transformation in religious moderation begins from the smallest institution, such as the family. M.H.A.M. emphasized that the family has a central role in shaping children's character from an early age. If children are taught to appreciate differences and live side by side with adherents of other religions, they will grow into individuals who are tolerant and open to diversity. In the context of education, students who are involved in social studies and humanities are expected to deepen their understanding of religious moderation through courses such as anthropology and sociology of religion. This understanding can encourage them to be active in various academic and social activities that emphasize the values of tolerance. For example, students can initiate interfaith discussions, seminars, or research projects that explore the practice of religious moderation in society. Thus, education and awareness from an early age are key to creating a harmonious and sustainable culture of diversity.

M.H.A.M. also sees the great potential of social media in spreading the values of religious moderation. The younger generation is currently very familiar with social media, so this platform can be used to spread positive messages about tolerance and harmony. However, she also reminded of the importance of digital literacy so that the younger generation can filter correct information and not be easily influenced by hoaxes or hate speech. Although face-to-face learning with a teacher or ustadz remains ideal, social media has opened up wider access for anyone to seek religious knowledge. Through social media platforms, someone can easily find various religious materials, from short lectures to in-depth studies. This allows individuals to independently explore religious knowledge according to their interests and needs. Social media also plays a role in inspiring the younger generation to study religion more deeply. Short videos, infographics, and other interesting content can trigger curiosity and encourage someone to seek more reliable learning sources. Thus, social media can be a gateway for someone to enter a wider religious world.

The multilingual and dialogical character of interfaith-related manuscripts in Malaysia—often written in accessible Malay and shaped by inclusive theological narratives—reflects a cultural transformation that embraces diversity as a strength rather than a threat. At the same time, the sustained articulation of respectful interreligious dialogue across generations demonstrates a living tradition rooted in shared moral values and adaptive religious expressions that transcend cultural boundaries.

In an interview with Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Lecturer J.A.W., the Islamic view on diversity was discussed. He emphasized that the Quran teaches us to respect each other between religions. The Quran encourages Muslims to establish good dialogue with followers of other religions. The verses of the Quran invite us to discuss with people who have different opinions politely and wisely, with the aim of seeking the truth and understanding each other. Other Malaysian Religious Figures also emphasized in the following Table 7:

From the table above, it can be understood that informant C.D. emphasized that the unity of Christianity does not lie in uniformity, but in diversity united by the same faith. He explained that because Christianity was born and developed in various cultural contexts, the expression of Christian faith also became diverse. However, there is a core unity that unites Christians throughout the world. He also highlighted the influence of Western culture on people's perceptions of Christianity in Malaysia. However, he emphasized that Christianity is not a religion that is only identical to Western culture. Christianity has long historical roots in the Middle East and has adapted to various cultures around the world. Meanwhile, informant J.S. shared her personal experience of growing up in a multicultural family. She saw that Buddhism in her family was not just a religious teaching, but also a very personal way of life. She also emphasized that Buddhism is very open to cultural diversity. According to her, Buddhism teaches that all humans are equal and have the potential to achieve enlightenment, regardless of their cultural background.

The actualization of religious moderation values in Indonesia, especially in Denpasar, is reflected in various educational initiatives, such as those carried out at Madrasah Khalifah Denpasar. One real implementation is teacher training on religious moderation in collaboration with the Denpasar City Training Center. This training involves speakers from various religious backgrounds, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The aim is to equip teachers with insight into religious moderation so that it can be integrated into character education in schools. The methods used in this learning include role-playing that includes the values of tolerance, justice, and peace. In addition, the implementation of the independence curriculum from the Ministry of Religion through the *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin student profile project* is integrated with the Pancasila student profile project. An example is the implementation of a flag ceremony that emphasizes the value of togetherness, where all students from various religious backgrounds participate in activities collectively.

The actualization of the values of religious moderation in the field of education is reflected in the implementation of the independent curriculum from the Ministry of Religion in the *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*

Table 7. Interfaith leaders' views on religious moderation in Malaysia.

Informant	Important quotes	Data interpretation
J.A.W.	'The Koran teaches us to respect each other between religious communities. The Koran encourages Muslims to establish good dialogue with followers of other religions'.	Islam emphasizes the importance of interfaith dialogue and respect for differences of belief.
J.A.W.	'The verses of the Quran invite us to discuss with people who have different opinions in a polite and wise manner, with the aim of seeking the truth and understanding each other'.	Islam encourages an open and tolerant attitude in discussions with followers of other religions.
J.A.W.	'We are invited to learn from other religions and cultures, and to establish good cooperation with fellow humans'.	Islam encourages Muslims to learn from other religions and cultures and to build harmonious relationships with followers of other religions.
C.D.	'Unity in Christianity does not lie in uniformity, but in diversity united by the same faith'.	Christians recognize the diversity of expressions of faith but still emphasize the core unity.
C.D.	'Christianity has long historical roots in the Middle East and has adapted to many cultures around the world'.	Christianity is not a religion exclusive to Western culture, but has broad roots and adaptability.
J.S.	'Buddhism in his family is not just a religious teaching, but also a very personal way of life'.	Buddhism is not just a ritual, but also an integral part of everyday life.
J.S.	'Buddhism is very open to cultural diversity. According to him, Buddhism teaches that all humans are equal and have the potential to achieve enlightenment, regardless of their cultural background'.	Buddhism has an inclusive view of cultural diversity and emphasizes the equality of all human beings.

student profile project integrated with the Pancasila student profile project. This approach emphasizes the value of nationalism that is in line with the concept of tolerance and balance (*tawazun*). An example is seen in the implementation of the flag ceremony, where all students participate together as a form of togetherness, without differences in religion or background. In addition, the concept of interfaith interaction is also applied in the teacher recruitment policy at Madrasah Khalifah Denpasar, which opens up opportunities for non-Muslim teachers to teach. Initially, this policy caused pros and cons among parents because of concerns about the influence on students' beliefs. However, the foundation guaranteed that non-Muslim teachers would not teach religious material. Instead, their presence is a real example of building harmonious communication in the school environment, creating a model of diversity that can be practiced in everyday social life.

The use of Arabic, Persian, and Malay simultaneously within manuscripts such as OR 83999, 1616, and 507056—preserved at Leiden University Library—demonstrates a deep-rooted commitment to linguistic inclusivity and cross-cultural dialogue in Islamic scholarly traditions of the Malay-Indonesian world. As Daneshgar (2022), a scholar in Islamic and Southeast Asian studies at the University of Freiburg, explains in his lecture *Persianate Aspects of the Malay-Indonesian World*, these manuscripts contain interlinear translations, poetic commentaries, and hybrid terminologies that reflect no single linguistic dominance. Instead, they illustrate a balanced triad of sacred language (Arabic), cosmopolitan scholarship (Persian), and local wisdom (Malay), thereby enshrining moderation through language. Islam was communicated through forms the local populace could easily grasp, bypassing rigid language hierarchies. The choice to render Qur'anic verses and theological concepts into Malay and Persian poetry, such as in manuscript 507056, shows a flexible and culturally adaptive hermeneutics—one that foregrounds aesthetics, empathy, and resonance over textual absolutism. This is a clear manifestation of moderation in both pedagogy and religious outreach.

Furthermore, Daneshgar's findings underscore the cosmopolitan openness of Islam in maritime Southeast Asia. He references historical accounts and inscriptions showing how Malay and Persian sailors frequently exchanged crew and jointly ventured to China during the Sasanian period. These multicultural exchanges, also discussed in *The Golden Peaches of Samarkand* by Edward Schafer, are corroborated by Daneshgar's discovery of Persian references to Malay 'dato' figures in Chinese records dating back over 700 years. Such narratives reflect Islam's development through trade, diplomacy, and intellectual partnerships rather than conquest. Notably, Daneshgar also highlights the presence of Malay manuscripts in Iranian libraries, pointing to longstanding intellectual exchanges between Malay and Persian scholars in places like Mecca, Isfahan, and possibly Shiraz. These interactions affirm Islam as a global yet locally grounded knowledge system—open, dialogical, and *wasathiy* (moderate). Referring to Malay as the 'Latin of the East', Daneshgar emphasizes its function as a medium of diplomacy and religious education across Southeast Asia, even influencing Persian scholarly circles—further demonstrating moderation through mutual cultural respect and linguistic accommodation.

Moderate religious values in the Malay-Indonesian manuscript tradition: key aspects and cultural transformations

In Table 8 above, the use of Malay as a lingua franca in maritime manuscripts—integrating Arabic, Persian, and local Southeast Asian elements—demonstrates how cultural transformation within Islam in the region unfolded through peaceful means such as trade, diplomacy, and intellectual exchange. The presence of bilingual or trilingual manuscripts and the use of local writing media underscore a living tradition that is adaptive, wherein Islamic values of moderation and openness are translated into culturally resonant and meaningful forms for local communities.

The presence of Islamic manuscripts in the Malay-Indonesian world affirms that the discourse of religious moderation is not a recent phenomenon, but a deeply rooted cultural reality that has existed for centuries. These manuscripts reveal how moderation was practiced through literacy, translation, and localization of Islamic teachings. Multilingual approaches, the use of local symbols, and the integration of religious knowledge into educational systems demonstrate that Islam in Indonesia and Malaysia has always been open, non-exclusive, and aligned with local cultural values. This openness is evident in the

Table 8. Comparative analysis of religious moderation values in classical Malay-Indonesian manuscripts.

Aspect	Description of manuscript & findings	Value transformation in Malay-Indonesian culture	Elements of religious moderation
Language	Three languages in a single manuscript: Arabic, Persian, and Malay (OR 83999, 1616, 507056)	Malay served as the bridge for Islamic knowledge	Linguistic inclusivity and local accommodation
Exegetical Method	Qur'anic exegesis rendered in Persian-Malay poetry (507056)	Local aesthetics used to interpret the Qur'an	Contextualizing religious teachings through art
Writing Medium	Local paper (<i>luang</i>); Jawi script and rare hybrid calligraphy (1616, 507056)	Islam conveyed through local media, not imposed externally	Recognition of indigenous wisdom
Cosmopolitanism	Persian sailors on Malay ships and vice versa (<i>Golden Peaches</i>)	Maritime relations shaped a transnational and open Islam	Islam developed through interaction, not isolation
Malay as the 'Latin of the East'	Malay used by Persians and taught in Isfahan	Malay became a global Islamic intellectual language	Reinforcing universal values within a local framework
Trade and Preaching	Evidence of Persian–Malay trade in the South China Sea (Majid Daneshgar)	Islamic proselytization spread through peaceful commerce	Non-confrontational da'wah grounded in trade ethics
Local Heroic Narratives	Epic of Hamzah Fansuri resisting Portuguese forces (7360)	Islam embodied within cultural resistance narratives	Islam as a moral force, not a militant one
Intellectual Networks	Malay manuscripts found in Iranian libraries	Malay scholars actively engaged with the wider Islamic world	Intellectual openness across regions

Table 9. Comparative table of religious moderation in four classical manuscripts.

Aspect	Or 83999 < br>(North sumatra – mandailing)	1616 < br>(batavia – Central java)	507056 < br>(Aceh/pidi)	7360 < br>(malay jawi – epic narrative)
Estimated Date	Late 17th – early 19th century	October 19, 1581	1450–1521 (carbon-dated)	Uncertain, likely during Portuguese colonial conflict
Origin & Medium	North Sumatra; handwritten, multilingual	Batavia; <i>luang</i> (Baros tree paper)	Aceh or Pidie; local paper	Malay; mixed Jawi script
Languages	Arabic, Persian, Malay (interlinear)	Arabic, Malay, Persian (Malayised Persian)	Arabic, Persian, Malay (in poetic form)	Malay Jawi, Arabic, localized phonetic terms
Main Content	General Islamic teachings and commentaries	Arabic grammar (Mi'yār al-'Arabiyyah)	Qur'anic exegesis in poetic verse	Heroic Islamic epic of Hamzah Fansuri
Distinctive Features	Seamless multilingual transitions	Formal grammar structure; contextual education	Rhymed exegesis in old Malay	Islamic heroism embedded in local storytelling
Socio-Cultural Purpose	Religious education and localization of knowledge	Contextualized grammar education	Spiritual preaching through poetic language	Resistance spirit and cultural identity formation
Linguistic Approach	Equal multilingual structure (interlinear)	Contextual and analytical translation	Interlinear poetry: Arabic → Persian → Malay	Local adaptation of foreign terms
Local vs Global Value	Arabic–Persian–Malay balance	Global (Mi'yār) → Local (Javanese)	Persian poetry interpreted in Malay context	Global Islam voiced through local oral tradition
Religious Moderation Element	Linguistic and cultural tolerance, doctrinal-traditional balance	Rational Islamic education, openness to language diversity	Humanistic, poetic, and adaptive Islam	Islam as a moral and cultural force of the people

way language, pedagogy, and interpretation were tailored to fit the socio-cultural realities of each region. A comparison of these aspects is presented in Table 9 below.

These manuscripts reflect a deeply embedded tradition of wasathiyah (religious moderation), not just as doctrine but as an integrated way of life. From poetic Qur'anic interpretation to multilingual grammar books and heroic epics, each manuscript contributes to a portrait of Islam as a religion that adapts, dialogues, and dignifies local cultures. Rather than imposing rigid textualism, these texts embody the values of tolerance, rationality, aesthetics, and cultural empathy, offering a historical foundation for the contemporary discourse on religious moderation in Southeast Asia. The multilingual structure, poetic forms, and use of local materials in classical Malay-Indonesian manuscripts illustrate how Islamic teachings were harmonized with indigenous pedagogies, enabling religious values to be deeply embedded in local cultural practices. These physical attributes are not merely aesthetic choices but are manifestations of

Table 10. Typology of Malay manuscript based on expert interviews, academic lectures, and digital ethnography.

Source	Title/content	Type of manuscript	Focus of study	Cultural/scholarly aspects	Media/format
Interview with A.G.	Malay Diplomatic Letters at the British Library	Malay diplomatic correspondence	Material aspects: illumination, paper, seals, calligraphy	Diplomatic representation and visual identity of culture	YouTube: School of Gilding and Ornamentation
Interview with A.G. (continued)	<i>The Look of the Book</i>	Various Arabic-script manuscripts	Aesthetics and regional visual traditions	Visual identification of cultural origin through book design	YouTube: School of Gilding and Ornamentation
Lecture by D.C.M.	Experience Studying <i>Hikayat Shamsul Anuar</i>	<i>Hikayat Shamsul Anuar</i> (Classical Malay tale)	Symbolism, historical continuity, persona	Relationship between humans and nature; continuity in time; collective identity in characters	YouTube: The Official IUM Library
General Lecture	Introduction to Malay Manuscripts	Various Malay manuscripts	History, topics, and manuscript distribution	Socio-cultural context, use of Jawi script, multidisciplinary content	Malay Manuscript Lecture Series, IUM
Ethical Research Notes	Use of ChatGPT and YouTube in Field Research	Digital data and AI-generated content	Ethics of digital and AI data usage	Informant consent, cultural and religious sensitivity, proper attribution	Field observation and researcher reflection

a dynamic living tradition where religious moderation—rooted in inclusivity, rationality, and cultural adaptation—became a historically sustained mode of Islamic expression in Southeast Asia.

The following Table 10 presents a classification of Malay manuscripts based on triangulated sources, including expert interviews, academic lectures, and digital content. This categorization aims to highlight the diversity of manuscript types, their cultural and textual dimensions, and the media through which they are examined, offering a multifaceted understanding of the Malay manuscript tradition.

By synthesizing data from textual analysis, oral discourse, and digital platforms, this classification underscores not only the richness of Malay manuscript heritage but also the methodological complexity in studying it—where visual materiality, narrative symbolism, and ethical considerations converge to inform a deeper cultural appreciation.

Discussion

Indonesian and Malaysian manuscripts form a core part of the literary and intellectual heritage of Southeast Asia. For centuries, they have served as vital repositories of religious, cultural, and philosophical knowledge. This study shows that such manuscripts—ranging from OR 83999 (Mandailing), 1616 (Batavia), 507056 (Pidie), to 7360 (Malay Jawi)—not only preserve doctrinal content but also reflect rich linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural adaptations that support the practice of religious moderation (Daneshgar, 2022). For instance, the trilingual structure of manuscripts like OR 83999 and 1616 demonstrates linguistic inclusivity and a pedagogical openness that breaks away from rigid monolingual orthodoxy, promoting Malay as a bridge of Islamic knowledge rather than merely a vernacular tool. Likewise, the poetic interpretation of the Qur'an in 507056 and the epic narrative of 7360 exemplify a contextual and aesthetic approach to Islamic teaching—where tradition and creativity coexist to foster tolerance, adaptability, and community resonance.

This manuscript-based cultural literacy is not a marginal aspect of Islamic tradition in the region but a central tool for the negotiation of identity, values, and coexistence. In regions like Wajo, Parepare, and Sinjai (South Sulawesi), field data shows that local traditions such as *masama waé* (egalitarian ethos) and dialogic Islamization through manuscript-based teachings have laid the foundation for a socially embedded moderation. These findings, supported by the testimonies of researchers like Husnul Fahimah Ilyas (As'adiyah Channel, 2021), affirm that religious moderation in Nusantara is not a novel import, but a lived and evolving tradition. Therefore, the management and revitalization of manuscript heritage should not remain sectoral or elitist (Sangaji & Rasyid, 2022; Vrandečić, 2008), but must adopt a holistic,

inclusive, and transdisciplinary approach that bridges philology, community history, education, and digital platforms such as YouTube.

In this light, religious moderation becomes more than a policy slogan—it becomes a dynamic interpretative process shaped by language, memory, and local epistemology. Just as a film's soundtrack subtly shapes the audience's understanding of a scene, religious moderation works in the background of daily practices, guiding interactions, rituals, and pedagogies across time and space. The global flows of culture and technology, like the Korean Wave (Tarasov et al., 2019), have reshaped how societies engage with tradition; however, the nuanced values embedded in local manuscripts remain essential to navigating these changes. The intertextual and intercultural layers of Islamic manuscripts serve not just as relics but as living blueprints of coexistence and pluralism. Thus, actualizing the values of moderation today—through reinterpretation, education, and cultural integration—is both a form of preserving the intellectual past and a method of adapting religious discourse for a harmonious future.

Manuscript preservation is not a static process, but rather a dynamic endeavor that ensures that intellectual heritage remains relevant to modern society. Copying a manuscript does not only mean duplicating the text, but also ensuring that future generations can read it, understand it, and share it with other communities. In this context, universities have a central role in the digital preservation of ancient manuscripts (Sun & Wang, 2022). The goal is not simply to archive the manuscript in a database or store it in the cloud, but also to make it accessible to the community from which it originated and to anyone interested in learning about the culture. The main challenge in bringing these manuscripts to a wider audience is the limitation of language and accessibility. Most of the manuscripts are not written in languages commonly used today, requiring academic intervention to describe, publish, and translate them (Samson, 2006). In this way, the values of religious moderation embodied in the manuscripts can continue to contribute to the understanding of culture in the modern era.

Manuscript studies are an intellectual tradition that plays a role in preserving Islamic values, especially among followers of the tarekat. This practice has been carried out for generations and continues to develop as part of efforts to preserve the heritage of Islamic knowledge. Several tarekat books such as *Jawahir al-Ma'ani wa Bulug al-Ma'ani*, *Mizab al-Rahmah fi al-Tarbiyah li al-Tarekat al-Tijâniyah*, and *Rimah fi Hizb al-Rahim* are important sources in the study of religious moderation (Hamkah, 2020). This tradition has not only developed in the Islamic world but has also attracted the attention of global academics. For example, Germany has a long history of philological research and interdisciplinary studies involving figures such as August Wilhelm, Friedrich von Schlegel, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Georg F. Grotefend (Jungraithmayr, 1995). Therefore, the study and preservation of Islamic manuscripts in Malaysia not only enriches Islamic science, but also becomes part of the effort to strengthen Islamic civilization based on authentic sources.

Currently, manuscript preservation management continues to develop through digital and conventional approaches in various countries, including in Africa. Ghana, for example, has initiated the digitization of manuscripts as a preservation effort to prevent the loss of scientific and cultural heritage (Boamah et al., 2016). This innovation trend allows for more effective and sustainable manuscript management (Prastiani & Subekti, 2019). However, the success of manuscript preservation does not only depend on technology, but is also influenced by political factors, public participation, public awareness, and other contextual factors. The main challenges in preserving ancient manuscripts include the lack of human resources (HR) in the fields of transliteration and translation, budget constraints, and inadequate facilities and infrastructure. Therefore, philological studies in the context of preserving Islamic manuscripts, both in Indonesia and internationally, are crucial. This aims to build a global academic community network and make Islamic philology a strategic issue in the development of manuscript studies.

The challenges in introducing manuscripts to a wider audience are not only related to limited access, but also to the complexity of the content and language used. Most manuscripts are not written in languages commonly understood today, requiring academic intervention in the form of description, publication, and translation so that their messages can be accessed by the global community (Chik et al., 2018). However, who is responsible for disseminating this knowledge? Is it the academics who bring it to the classroom or the intellectual community who translates its meaning into a modern context? This challenge shows that the preservation of manuscripts is not just an effort to maintain historical heritage, but also a process of cultural transformation that involves reinterpreting and distributing information in

the digital era (Rouse, 1992). Therefore, collaboration between academics, educational institutions, and the wider community is the main key to maintaining the relevance of manuscripts as part of the actualization of the discourse on transformative religious moderation.

People from all walks of life—from elementary school students to graduate students, as well as the general public interested in history and culture—have a role to play in learning and actualizing the values contained in manuscripts (Naudé, 2002). Universities seek to reach audiences beyond the academic community by providing access to digital collections so that people can understand the world in all its social dynamics. In the next 20 years, can we imagine that all of these digital collections will form an interconnected information network, rather than just a random collection of materials? To realize this vision, universities cannot make subjective selections in choosing manuscripts to be digitized. With the limitations of being able to predict the interests of a particular academic or community in the next 50 or even 100 years, the most strategic step is to digitize every available manuscript, so that this intellectual heritage remains accessible and provides benefits for future generations.

Religious moderation is part of the concept of Wasatiyah Islam, which emphasizes balance and a middle way in understanding the principles of the Qur'an, especially in a society with a high level of plurality (Hasan, 2017). This concept is an important element in maintaining social harmony amidst diversity. Another perspective defines religious moderation as a pattern of moderate and inclusive religious understanding, which makes the reality of diversity a potential to strengthen social cohesion and reduce conflict (Jones & Thornton, 2005). In the context of living tradition, religious moderation is not only understood theoretically but also manifested in the daily practices of Indonesian and Malaysian society. This is reflected in various aspects of social life, education, and culture that continue to develop without leaving the roots of moderate Islamic values. Thus, religious moderation remains a relevant and sustainable principle in facing the dynamics of the times.

Education plays a central role in instilling the values of religious moderation. The curriculum in Indonesia and Malaysia has been designed to include materials that emphasize the importance of tolerance and respect for religious differences (Riyanto, 2010). In addition, interfaith dialogue is actively carried out to strengthen understanding and build harmonious relationships in a multicultural society. The conceptual difference between religious moderation and religious moderation. Religious moderation focuses on how individuals practice and apply their religious teachings in social interactions, while religious moderation is more related to how the religious teachings themselves are interpreted. Religion cannot be substantially moderated, but the way it is understood and applied can be adjusted to the context of the times and society (Shihab, 1999). Therefore, religious moderation is essential in forming an inclusive, tolerant mindset that is able to bridge differences in order to create a harmonious life.

The phenomenon of the spread and adaptation of religious moderation values in manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia reflects the complex intellectual dynamics in Muslim societies in both countries. This adaptation shows how religious moderation values are not only accepted but also internalized through local social and cultural contexts. This process confirms that religious moderation is not just an abstract concept, but rather part of an intellectual tradition that continues to develop. In addition, the use of Malay as the main medium in the dissemination of knowledge is an important factor in the formation of religious and cultural identities. Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as an instrument in forming a more inclusive and contextual understanding of religion. Thus, the study of manuscripts containing religious moderation values provides in-depth insight into how Muslim societies in Indonesia and Malaysia adapt to changing times without abandoning their traditional roots.

Conclusion

This study examines the role of Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia in internalizing the values of religious moderation amid the dynamics of local cultural transformation. The primary focus lies in how these classical texts serve not only as sources of religious teachings but also as living media that allow Islamic values to adapt contextually to local cultures.

Using a qualitative approach through philological methods, in-depth interviews, and participant observation—conducted at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and in Denpasar, Bali—this research finds

that manuscript heritage plays an active role in shaping a moderate Islamic tradition, characterized by peaceful, inclusive, and contextualized expressions of Islam.

Key findings indicate that the values of moderation—such as gender justice, tolerance for differences, respect for local customs, and preaching based on indigenous wisdom—are not only written in the texts but are also internalized into social practices, as reflected in the traditions of communities in Wajo, Parepare, and other areas in South Sulawesi. For instance, the *masama waé* principle in inheritance distribution and the dialogues between local leaders and scholars such as Sheikh Madinah demonstrate a form of moderation rooted in dialogue and mutual understanding rather than rigid textual enforcement. The use of Malay as the primary medium for disseminating Islamic knowledge strengthens religious identity while bridging the integration of Islamic values with local culture. This creates a living tradition that is dynamic and adaptive, allowing Islam to function meaningfully across various segments of a multicultural society. The preservation and digitization of manuscripts have become essential strategies in maintaining the continuity of the Islamic intellectual heritage in Southeast Asia. However, challenges remain, including limited access to certain collections, a lack of advanced philological studies, and the influence of political interpretations that may distort the original meaning of the texts. Therefore, a multidisciplinary approach is needed—combining textual studies, anthropology, social history, and Islamic education—to enrich the understanding of the contribution of living traditions in Islamic manuscripts to the development of moderate Islamic thought. This study is expected to provide new insights for academics, historians, and policy-makers in efforts to preserve and optimize the function of Islamic manuscripts as the foundation of a peaceful, tolerant, and contextual civilization in contemporary society.

This study shows that Islamic manuscripts in Indonesia and Malaysia have an important role in internalizing the values of religious moderation in society. The main findings indicate that religious moderation in manuscripts is not only normative, but also develops through a process of adaptation to local culture. The dissemination of these values is supported by the use of Malay as the main medium, which allows for broader and contextual understanding. In addition, the preservation and digitization of manuscripts is a strategic step in maintaining the continuity of Islamic intellectual heritage in Southeast Asia. This study also found that a holistic approach in managing manuscripts, involving various stakeholders such as academics, local communities, and cultural institutions, contributes to the effectiveness of their preservation and utilization. Thus, manuscripts are not only historical artifacts, but also function as educational and reference media in building moderate and inclusive religious understanding.

However, this study has several limitations that need to be considered in further studies. First, limited access to certain manuscript collections limits the scope of analysis to a wider variety of texts. Second, although this study has attempted a multidisciplinary approach, limitations in resources and time mean that there are still certain aspects that cannot be explored in depth, such as the socio-political influence on religious moderation in manuscripts. Third, the challenge in validating the interpretation of manuscripts is a separate obstacle, considering that many texts still require more comprehensive philological studies. Therefore, further research with a more extensive and collaborative approach is needed to enrich the understanding of the role of Islamic manuscripts in shaping religious moderation in Indonesia and Malaysia.

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