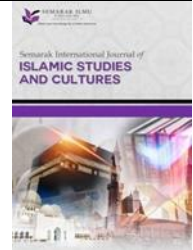




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Role of Islamic Thought and Culture in the Artificial Intelligence World

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ABSTRACT

Regardless of the negative picture cast it by the hostile media about Islam, the global community is increasingly showing interest in understanding the Islamic thought and culture for various purposes, including political and economic influence. Thus, Muslim intellectuals need to be aware of this fact and get ready for its implications at both local and global levels. Study of other cultures, i.e., religions, languages and lifestyles of other nations, in the globalizing world, which characterized by global flow of information and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, is important as a basic means for effective communication, mutual understanding and cooperation between nations. The Holy Qur'an shifts attention of the global community to the importance of mutual understanding between nations, as stated in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13): '*O people! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know each other*'. The progress in new technologies, especially advancements in AI, data analytics, and educational tools, has significantly influenced Islamic culture over the last few decades. The progress in new technologies, especially advancements in AI, data analytics and educational tools, has significantly influenced Islamic culture over the last few decades. This paper aims to investigate the role and future directions of Islamic thought and culture in light of new technological advancements, particularly in AI, and how they influence Islamic education. Critical examination is necessary in adopting the new technologies to ensure that scientific advancements are align with the principles and objectives of Islamic

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thought. The method adopted in this paper is theoretical and analytical in nature. It is expected that the outcomes of the paper will provide clear guidelines for Islamic thought to harness the potential prospects of new technologies and overcome its challenges in Muslim societies.

1. Introduction

The future direction of Islamic thought holds great significance, not only for Muslim societies but also for the global community. Exploring how Islamic thought interacts with an increasingly globalized world, shaped by advanced technologies such as AI, is essential. For a scientific discussion of the Islamic thought and culture in its current situation and future direction in a world dominated by advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), we need to reflect briefly on philosophical foundations of a culture.

1.1 Thought and Culture

Differentiating between two modes of developing the culture and civilization, Malik Bin Nabi says in his book *'Problems of Thoughts in Muslim World'*: "When mankind isolates himself, he feels the vacuum in the universe. According to Malik Bin Nabi, the way humans address the void in their understanding of the universe shapes their culture and civilization. There are mainly two ways to fill this vacuum, he either looks down to earth around his feet or he rises his eyes toward the sky. The first way fills up his vacuum with things, which he endeavours to own them and control; while the second way fills his vacuum with thoughts, looking the truth for his questions. The two ways of filling up the vacuum of the universe will establish two modes of culture and civilization: (i) the culture of things, that based on technology, which aims to control; and (ii) the culture of thoughts, based on morality and metaphysics, which aims to uncover the phenomenon of religion.

While secular civilization is based on culture of *things* (looking down), the Islamic civilization is based on a balance between the material (looking down) and the metaphysical (looking up), or dealing with things (technology) and abstract thoughts (religion & morality). There are enormous Qur'anic verses which support this conclusion, the following is the most obvious: "Do they not look at the camels, how they are created * and at the mountains, how they are installed * and at the earth, how it is spread out?" (Surat al-Ghashiyah, 17-20)⁵. This Qur'anic verse emphasizes the importance of observing nature and reflecting on God's creation, which aligns with the Islamic tradition of combining spiritual and empirical knowledge. In the modern era, this reflection becomes even more relevant as AI and other technologies offer new ways to explore and understand the world around us. In addition, shifts human attention toward nature and invites his intellect to investigate the dynamic processes of the natural phenomena based on the relevant methods of inquiry for truth discovery. It also shifts the attention to unity in diversity of mankind and necessity of cultural understanding and cooperation for a peaceful and progressive life of human community.

However, Bin Nabi notes that both modes of cultural formation are not stable, but changeable based time and place. Therefore, the continuous reformation of Islamic thought to keep the balance is necessary. Today, the Islamic thought has lost the balance and challenged by progress in secular science and technology. This paper aims to investigate fundamentals of Islamic thought and culture as reflected by "Islamic studies" as main source.

⁵﴿أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ (17) وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ (18) وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ (19) وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ (20)﴾ (الغاشية)

1.2 The Framework

The term “Islamic studies” is used in various contexts, but it generally conceived as the multidisciplinary programme which aims to educate Islam, as well as the analytical study of Muslim communities^{**}. ‘Islamic studies’ in both concepts is an important means to promote Islam and introduce it to the global community for mutual understanding and cooperation between Muslims and other nations. The significance role of Islamic studies to the global community has been shown by the education programmes on this subject and academic research activities conducted in the Western world within the last few decades. For instance, the official reports^{††} of the UK government and the concluding remarks of initiatives commissioned by agencies, such as HEFCE^{‡‡}, have recommended that there is an essential need for the study of Islam and Muslims to be developed as a significant field of study across all levels of education in Britain. They emphasized that, this is not only for education of British youth as global citizens with a good knowledge and understanding of the contemporary world, but also as an effective means for communication with Muslim communities. Similar views on Islamic studies have been shown by universities and other research institutions in USA and other European countries^{§§}.

Importance of Islamic studies also has been reflected by the recent academic research and literature on this topic. A pilot survey or short literature review on this topic in the course of last few decades, could easily show that terms such as Islam, Muslim, and ‘Islamic studies’ have been the favorite subject of the academia, the strategic program for research centers, besides being the central issue of the political discourse and media in the Western world. The basic question that may arise, in this context, is what is the objective? Why the Western world is so concerned with ‘Islamic studies?’ In fact, the textual and analytical study of Islam has been the favorite research subject for the ‘orientalism’ since long time, but its current trends are questionable in its real objectives and implications on future of Muslim world.

In all cases, study of other cultures, i.e., religions, languages and lifestyles of other nations, in the globalizing world which characterized by free movement of ideas, is important as a basic means for

^{**} According to Siddiqui Report (2009), ‘Islamic Studies means studies concerning Islam, covering all its aspects, cultural and religious, economic and political, social and philosophical, past and present, regional and universal. It involves the doctrine but also the lived experience; anything which affects the beliefs, the history and the social organisation of Muslims would fall under Islamic studies.

^{††} Reports on situation of Islam and Islamic studies in Western countries are regularly conducted by the governments for proper decision making. For example, in UK there are regular reports, such as the Reay Report (1909), the Scarbrough Report (1947), the Hayter Report (1961), the Parker Report (1986), and Siddiqui Report (2007), which focuses on (what measures can be taken to improve the quality of information about Islam that is available to students and staff in universities in England.) The same in other European countries and USA.

^{‡‡} HEFCE stands for ‘The Higher Education Funding Council for England’. Its web site is <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/>. These initiatives include various programmes and activities, such as conferences and reports. The most important conferences on Islamic studies are that which conducted between 2006 and 2008. Robert Gleave (2008) have made a summary of these conferences as following: (1) The State of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Western Universities', 27-29th November 2006, School of Oriental and African Studies. (2) Islam on Campus: Teaching Islam in Higher Education', 8th December 2006, University of Edinburgh. (3) Time for Change Symposium', 19th January 2007, Al Maktoum Institute, Dundee. (4) Islamic Studies: Current Status and Future Prospects', 23rd November 2007, Lion Court Conference Centre, London, organized by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. (5) Islamic Studies: The Way Forward in the UK', 17th April 2008, Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, London, organised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

^{§§} Charles Kurzman and Carl W. Ernst (2016), in their work entitled "*Islamic Studies in US Universities*", notify that their brief overview of the institutional locations and political context of Islamic studies in American universities is intended to clarify the different kinds of research and teaching relevant to Islamic studies and how they relate to the contemporary political and cultural situation.

mutual understanding and cooperation between nations^{***}. However, such studies can be a subject for influence and control. In fact, 'Islamic studies' in the Western world, is closely linked with the latter case. It has been used for political purposes rather than academic research. In other words, the analytical study of Islamic culture has become an effective tool for influence. Some authors have commented that politicization of Islamic studies has led to the expectation that specialists in this field should be able to predict the next terrorist attack. (Bennett, Clinton, Ed., 2012)⁺⁺⁺. Of course, Islamic studies should be used as means for mutual understanding between the Western world and Muslims to create a peaceful environment, rather than predicting isolated individual acts. The important questions that may arise is about the common grounds of Muslim and non-Muslims approaches on Islamic studies, and how this may contribute in mutual understanding and cooperation? And how the Islamic studies can play an effective role to create a peaceful environment in global community?

Aiming to address such questions, this article highlights the various approaches on conceptualizing 'Islamic studies', from both the Western and Muslim perspectives, and implications of that on future directions of Islamic studies in the globalizing world of post-secularism.

2. Methodology

This paper employs a theoretical and analytical approach, utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The relevant references on the topic will be collected, mainly on line using the suitable methods of data collection. The relevant Qur'anic verses, saying the Prophet (SWS), views of Muslim scholars on the topic will be collected and analysed. The main objective of the paper is to review how Islamic thought, and culture can influence the modern community of advanced technologies to formulate clear guidelines for ethical use of such technologies.

3. Results

3.1 Defining Islamic Studies in Contemporary Academia

The phrase 'Islamic studies' in the context of the contemporary academia and education is conceptualized in two different frameworks. Firstly, from non-Muslim perspective, especially in the Western world; and secondly, from the perspective of Muslim scholarship. In either case, the term describes both 'the Islamic theology' and Islamic 'anthropology'. These two disciplines approach the same phenomenon—Islam as a religion and as a culture and way of life—from different perspectives. Theologians aim to educate and propagate Islam, while social anthropologists aim to understand how Muslim communities practice Islam in their real life.

3.2 The Western Approach on Islamic Studies

In the framework of Western academia, media and political discourse, the term 'Islamic studies' is used in three contexts: **first**, education of Islamic teachings, either within the Muslim majority communities or to Muslim minorities in other countries; **second**, the sociological and anthropological study of Islam, i.e., the analytical study of Islamic culture as practiced by Muslim communities; **third**,

^{***} The Holy Qur'an shifts the attention of the global community to the importance of mutual understanding and cooperation between nations, saying: "O people! We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know each another" (49:13)

(يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ) (الحجرات: 13).

⁺⁺⁺ Bennett, Clinton (2012). [The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies](#). Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN 978-1441127884.

the term 'Islamic studies' is used for genealogical and philological study of Islam, that is a textual analysis and evaluation of the primary sources of Islam (Qur`an, Sunnah and Arabic language). The last approach has been the main method of the orientalism and the oriental studies across history of this concept. However, each of the above three concepts of 'Islamic studies' has its own objectives and implications. In fact, as rightly observed by some authors, these three concepts of Islamic studies in the Western scholarship constitute three different phases⁺⁺⁺.

Clinton Bennett (2012), summarizes these phases as following: **the first phase**, beginning with the oldest chair in Arabic, dates from sixteenth century. In this phase Bennett notes that, the concept of a professorial chair may actually have entered Europe from the Muslim world, where the professor sits on a chair and the students sit around him. According to Bennett, serious interest in studying Islam in West can be traced back as early as the twelfth century, when Robert of Ketton (d. 1160) paraphrased Qur`an into Latin. He consulted Muslim scholars and traditional works of tafsir (commentary), which did not become common practice among most subsequent translators. **The second phase** started in the eighteenth century, peaking in nineteenth and early twentieth. **The third phase**, according to Bennett, commencing around the midpoint of twentieth century, has started as 'Islamic Studies' and it attempting to separate itself from assumptions that dominated Oriental Studies, as that field had jettisoned aspects of the first phase, which was intimately related to a specifically Christian agenda. Clinton Bennett observes that by the end of phase one, more Arabic sources were available, some translated into English and other European languages. Two stimuli contributed to phase two's dawn: first was the Enlightenment and the second was the European's colonial expansion. (Clinton Bennett, Ed., 2012, p 8,9).

The major problem of Western approach on 'Islamic studies' in all phases, however, is that firstly it imposes the concept from external, i.e., Islam is considered as a mere source of culture, rather than a Divine religion that provides the worldview and gives meaning to life; and secondly this approach is closely linked with political and economic purposes^{\$\$\$}. These problems have been clearly reflected by all phases, it has become more obvious and severe in the third phase of 'Islamic studies', when scop of the concept was negatively extended in the opening of the new millennium, especially after events of 11/9, and Muslim communities were targeted under various agendas, such as 'war on terror' and 'countering radicalism'. In that context, all forms of religious education and practice, Islamic institutions, private Muslim agencies, and even personal dress code were and are being targeted. The negative impacts of such approaches on current situation of the global community are obvious. The 'Islamophobia' and the unnecessary global tension that associated with it is one of major results.

3.3 The Traditional Islamic Scholarship Approach to Islamic Studies

In the context of the Muslim scholarship, the term 'Islamic studies' is used mainly for education of the primary sources of Islam, i.e., Qur`an and Sunnah^{****}, and other subjects which are closely linked with these two sources of Islam, such as Arabic language, the science of Qur`an, and the science of Hadith; or science derived from Qur`an and Sunnah, such as Islamic law (Fiqh), Qur`anic

⁺⁺⁺ Bennett, Clinton (2012). *The Bloomsbury Companion to Islamic Studies*. Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN 978-1441127884.

^{\$\$\$} One of the emphases of the conference of 'The State of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Western Universities' conducted on 27-29th November 2006, by School of Oriental and African Studies' was 'the need to avoid the politicisation of Islamic studies, and to reject any government attempt to use it as a covert or overt counter-terrorism tool. (of course, this is one of the basic goals of the oriental studies, so it hardly to be avoided)

^{****} The former is the source of knowledge, guidance, and values which revealed by God; and the latter is the Prophet's method of application on what had been revealed to him, which includes his sayings, practices and his approvals. Every Muslim needs to have the fundamental education of these to sources, not only for knowledge but also for application.

exegeses, Islamic theology (*ilm al-kalam*) mysticism (*tasawwuf*), and others. This is the conventional and classical approach of 'Islamic studies' which designed since the early history of Islam and has been dominating the concept up to the contemporary era. The thoughtful and serious studies on the holy Qur'an and Sunnah by Muslim scholars, for education and application purposes or for academic research, have resulted in development of various sciences of Muslim scholarship.

The term 'Islamic studies' now commonly refers to Islamic education, but originally, it encompassed the broader field of 'Islamic sciences' (*al-Ulum al-Islamiyyah*), which includes a vast body of knowledge developed by Muslim scholars. These disciplines range from Tafsir (Qur'anic exegesis) and Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) to *Ilm al-Kalam* (theology) and *Ilm al-Akhlaq* (ethics). With guidance and in the framework of the two primary sources of Islam, either derived from it, such as Fiqh, or indispensably related to it such as Arabic and Tafsir. However, for some historical reasons, the term 'Islamic studies' is restricted later in education of certain fields, such as Islamic theology, Islamic law (Fiqh) and other subjects related to it; excluding many important fields highlighted by the Holy Qur'an. For instance, the education programmes of 'Islamic studies' in most of higher educational institutions in Muslim world are divided into three basic categories, each one can be regarded a separate department, which are (i) Qur'an and Sunnah studies (focus on primary sources fundamental knowledge of Islam); (ii) Fiqh and Usul Fiqh studies (focus on Islamic jurisprudence); (iii) Theology and comparative religions (programs that focus on theology).

Generally, this approach includes various disciplines of inquiry that flourished in Islamic civilization, which can be divided mainly into the following categories:

- (i) Sciences that aim to study and understand the revealed texts, such as studies on Arabic language, interpretations of holy Qur'an (*ilm al-tafsir*), translation of the revealed texts, history of the revelation (*Ulum al-Qur'an*), etc.
- (ii) Studies that concerned with the application and practice of the revelation and guidelines of the revealed texts. This includes disciplines such as *Ibadat*, *Fiqh*, *Usul Fiqh*, *Ulum al-Hadith*, *ilm al-Tasawuf*, *ilm al-Akhlaq*, etc.
- (iii) Studies that aim to provide the rational bases and arguments to the revealed knowledge, aiming at harmonizing and reconciling between reason and faith. This includes various topics, such as *ilm al-Kalam*, *Usul din*, *ilm al-aqid*, *Islamic philosophy*, *comparative religions*, etc.
- (iv) Studies focus on history of Islam and its gradual development, biography of key figures of Islam (*ilm Sirah*), flourishing of Islamic civilization and its subsequent declining, etc.
- (v) Studies that aim to understand the natural and human phenomena, as presented by the Holy Qur'an, such as astronomy, mathematics, and optics which flourished in early history of Islamic civilization and dominated the world for long period of time, but latter declined due to various factors.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The Future Direction of Islamic Studies

It is obvious that both of the above approaches on 'Islamic studies', i.e., Western and Islamic perspectives, have serious problems in the concept and objectives. The analytical method adopted by western approach on Islamic studies, across its three phases, was mainly used for political purposes rather than academic. Therefore, its conclusions were usually contradicted with those of Muslim scholarship. For instance, most of those who are regarded 'reformists' of Islam in the Western world are considered as 'heretics' or 'deviants' in the Muslim communities.

On the other hand, the classical concept of 'Islamic studies' in Muslim scholarship, has problems in the scop and in the method as well. In its scope, it neglects many important fields of study

emphasized by the Holy Qur'an, such as rational understanding and empirical observation of the natural world and social change, which are essential for understanding and appreciating the Creator. This includes reflection and rational understanding of the created world, mechanisms of social change, and the empirical study of the natural and human phenomena^{****}. In fact, the education of natural sciences was totally abounded in the Muslim communities, for various reasons, and instead they focused on teaching of Islamic law, i.e., method of deriving rules from the two primary sources. The methodical problems of Muslim approach are impeded in both the research methodology as well method of instruction.

4.2 The Need for a Holistic Approach

Reforming Islamic studies requires a holistic approach that integrates modern disciplines such as science, social studies, and technology, while still grounded in the core principles of Qur'anic and Sunnah-based scholarship. For example, Islamic universities could incorporate interdisciplinary courses that combine Fiqh and modern law, or ethics and artificial intelligence. The reductionist approach on 'Islamic studies' beside its inconsistency with method of empirical study which caused in flourishing of the various sciences in early history of Islamic civilization, it also does not take in consideration the central issues highlighted by the Holy Qur'an as an important mean to appreciate God and enhance faith in Him, such as study of the natural phenomenon. The practical implication of such approach was declining of science and technology in Islamic civilization and backwardness of Muslim communities. Thus, any serious effort to reform Islamic studies should focus on this point, i.e., extending the concept to includes all sciences that can be derived from the two sources of Islam, either natural, social, or legal. It also should develop the analytical research method instead of classical method which depends on memorization. This will contribute in development of relevant curriculum and effective method of instruction, especially in higher education.

4.3 The Future Directions

This article presupposes that the current global interest in Islamic studies^{****}, beside other events, is ultimately determining the positive direction of Islamic studies. There is a potential for the Islamic worldview to contribute significantly to the intellectual and ethical discourse in a globalizing, post-secular society, especially in promoting peace and harmony. However, this will depend on how effectively Muslim scholars and institutions can address current challenges. This will be caused by seemingly contradictory factors, internal and external, which are already in operation. The supporting arguments for this assumption can be derived from the external proposals that continuously attempting to formulate a false 'worldview' on Islam, such as clash of civilizations, war on terror, countering radicalism, and combat of religious extremism, which are in fact different tactics / phases of war on Islam and Muslims. However, all such plans, beside the current confrontation of great powers, are implicitly contributing in bringing Islam into the focus point of the world, where the universal value of Islam can be clearly visible to the collective mind of the global community. Exposing Muslims to such theories surely deprive for short term, especially Muslim minorities, but strategically it creates awareness on Islam and shifts the attention to its core values. It also shall

^{****} The creative initiatives of some of early Muslim intellectuals on these topics, such as of Ibnu Khaldun in his '*Al-Muqadimah*', and Ibnu Rusyd in many of his works, were neglected, and within domination of Fiqh culture it did not get chance to grow, develop and flourish.

^{****} In the course of the last few decades, 'Islam' has been a central issue of the global community, especially through the Western media, academic research and political discourse.

provoke Muslims for unity and motivate them for serious review of their current practices, towards actualizing the global principles of Islam and its universal values.

To achieve this vision, the following key factors must be addressed^{§§§§}: (i) reactivating the basic principles of the Islamic worldview, i.e., the relationship of Man, Nature and God; (ii) redefining 'Islamic studies' to include all sciences that can be derived from the primary sources of Islam, either social, natural or legal; (iii) developing the analytical method that integrate theology and social anthropology, especially in higher education; (iv) the strategic plan that brings the universal values of Islam, such as justice, humanity, honesty, and truthfulness, into focus and practice; (v) effective utilization of the modern information and communication technologies, not only to communicate people with each other but also with God, their Creator.

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^{§§§§} These factors are dynamic in nature; therefore, they are effective and changeable over the course of time and space.