



From Isnad to Institution: The Transformation of Hadith Knowledge Transmission in Shoutheast Asian Islamic Education

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Abstract

Historically, the transmission of hadith knowledge has relied on the isnad system and the personal authority of scholars legitimized through traditional ijazah. This article examines the structural and epistemological transformations in the transmission of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia, highlighting a sharp shift from the isnad-based model of authority toward the authority of modern educational institutions. Through a historical-sociological review, this study traces the evolution of learning spaces from traditional institutions such as *pesantren* and *surau* with their *talaqqi* system, through the era of tiered madrasahs, culminating in Islamic universities. The main argument put forward is that the institutionalization of Islamic education has triggered three fundamental impacts: (1) the redefinition of the ijazah from a spiritual license to merely an academic certification; (2) the objectification and textualization of knowledge, in which the memorization of hadith narrations has been replaced by historical-critical analytical methodologies; and (3) the emergence of a paradoxical tension between the democratization of access to knowledge and the desacralization of the teacher-student relationship. In conclusion, modern institutions have expanded the scope of hadith studies in the public sphere, yet at the same time have effectively reshaped the traditional scholarly architecture by placing institutions rather than individual scholars at the center of religious authority validation.

Keywords: Hadith Transmission, Isnad, Institutionalization, Southeast Asian Islamic Education, Religious Authority.

Introduction

The transmission of knowledge within the Islamic intellectual tradition has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other civilizations; one of these is the application of the isnad system, which refers to the chain of transmission of hadith narrations. Historically, the science of hadith was not viewed merely as a cognitive entity or a neutral accumulation of



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information, but rather as something sacred. Therefore, isnad originally emerged as a methodological verification tool to safeguard the authenticity of hadith texts from potential fabrication, distortion, or political intervention during the early days of Islam. However, over time, isnad transcended its technical-historical function. It transformed into the primary foundation for the construction of religious authority itself. This chain of transmission is not merely a list of names frozen in literature, but rather an intellectual genealogy that weaves together the vertical continuity of scholarly authority, ultimately tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad.¹

In the classical tradition, the validity and authenticity of a field of knowledge are not measured by how many books a seeker of knowledge reads on their own. Written texts are believed to have inherent limitations and are highly susceptible to misinterpretation if studied without guidance. True knowledge is believed to reside in the hearts of the scholars, not on the pages of books. This reliance on oral transmission gave rise to the *talaqqī* pedagogical method that is, precise face-to-face encounters and learning. This transmission centers the learning process on the *samā'* method and *qirā'ah 'alā al-shaykh* where the student recites the text in front of the teacher for correction. The culmination of this pedagogical relationship is the granting of an *ijāzah*, a transmission license that links the student's name to the spiritual lineage of their teacher. Through the *ijāzah*, a student is not merely certified as having completed a book but is granted the legitimacy to become a new link in the chain responsible for passing on the prophetic message to the next generation. This system, rooted in charismatic authority, has been the lifeblood of Islamic education for centuries and was later replicated as Islam took firm root in the outlying regions of the Islamic world, including Southeast Asia.²

In the Nusantara region, the transmission of hadith scholarship initially fully adopted and assimilated this isnad model in its entirety. Through an intensive intellectual network of scholars that formed between the Haramain (Mecca and Medina) and the Jawi world from the 17th century through the late 19th century, this scholarly tradition was transplanted into the traditional educational institutions of the Nusantara. Students from Southeast Asia, known as *Aṣḥāb al-Jāwīyyīn*, resided for years in the centers of the Islamic world, studying under leading muhaddithin, and then returned to their homelands bearing religious authority manifested in the form of memorized hadiths and ijazahs. They subsequently established and developed community-based educational institutions such as pesantren in Java, surau in Minangkabau, and pondok in the Malay Peninsula and Pattani.³

In these pre-modern institutions, the study of foundational hadith texts such as Sahih al-Bukhari or the *Kutub al-Sittah* was conducted through the bandongan system (where the

¹ Jonathan A.C. Brown, *Hadith Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World* (England: Oneworld Publications, 2009).

² Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

³ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia* (Gading Publishing: Yogyakarta, 2012).

teacher reads aloud and explains, and the students listen) or the sorogan system (where students recite passages). Within this sociological landscape, scholarly authority rests absolutely in the hands of a kiai or tuan guru. The scholar himself serves as the primary institution, if he passes away or moves elsewhere, that center of learning often fades away with him. Furthermore, recognition of a santri's expertise is not measured at all by an institutional diploma, but is determined by the depth of their devotion, absolute obedience, emotional closeness, and the blessing bestowed by the teacher. These spaces have succeeded in forming a holistic ecosystem in which the pursuit of knowledge is viewed as an act of worship and a spiritual journey, not merely an academic achievement.⁴

However, this traditional equilibrium underwent massive structural upheaval in the early to mid-20th century. The landscape of Islamic education in Southeast Asia was confronted by the tide of modernization, the penetration of Western-style colonial education policies and, subsequently, a growing wave of Islamic reformism. Reformist groups, or the "*Kaum Muda*" inspired by the ideas of Muhammad Abduh from Egypt began to criticize the traditional educational system, which they viewed as slow and unstructured. This historical response to both external and internal pressures triggered a drastic shift from a traditional, person-centered education toward a standardized, class-based madrasah system. This transition continued after the independence of Southeast Asian nations and reached its peak with the nationalization of religious education through the establishment of state-sponsored modern Islamic universities, such as the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) which has since been transformed into UIN in Indonesia and similar institutions in Malaysia.

Although there is a wealth of literature discussing the modernization of Islamic education in Southeast Asia such as the studies by Hefner, 2009; Azra, 2004; and Steenbrink, 1986.⁵ Research that specifically focuses its sociological analysis on shifts in methods of transmission and the reconstruction of authority within the discipline of hadith remains relatively limited. Most previous studies have largely focused on the general institutional history of education or the ideological struggle between traditionalists and reformists, without sharply dissecting how this institutionalization has reshaped the very anatomy of hadith scholarship itself, from the loss of the hegemony of text memorization and the teacher's oral tradition to the emergence of historical-critical discourse in the classroom.

Given this gap in the literature, this article aims to examine the structural and epistemological shifts in the transmission of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia. The main argument put forward in this study is that the institutionalization of Islamic education has triggered a radical shift in the centrality of authority: from personal-genealogical authority toward bureaucratic-academic authority. This shift is not merely a managerial adaptation but

⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*; Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

⁵ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*; Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*; Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Moderen* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986).

an epistemological transformation that carries three fundamental implications. First, the redefinition of the *ijazah* from a license for spiritual transmission to merely an administrative certification of graduation. Second, the textualization and methodological shift, in which the memorization of hadith chains and the pursuit of blessings have been replaced by critical, historical, and textual analytical approaches. Third, the emergence of a paradoxical tension in the modern educational landscape: on the one hand, institutionalization has succeeded in democratizing access to hadith scholarship in the public sphere, yet at the same time, it has inevitably triggered the desacralization of the social and spiritual relationship between teacher and student. By tracing this historical-sociological trajectory, this article aims to unpack how the architecture of scholarly authority in hadith studies is reconstructed and maintained within the contemporary Islamic educational landscape, which is shaped by the demands of modern rationality.

Method

This article is designed as a qualitative study based on library research,⁶ focusing on epistemological and structural shifts in the transmission of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia. To unravel the complexity of the transformation from the *isnad* system to modern academic institutions, this study operationally employs a historical-sociological approach. The integration of these two approaches was chosen to ensure that the analysis does not merely stop at the chronology of physical events but is also capable of unpacking the social meanings and shifts in religious power relations underlying those events.

Historically, this study employs conventional historical methods based on four main stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography.⁷ The historical approach is applied to trace the chronology and genealogy of shifts in the spaces for the transmission of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia. This tracing begins with the intellectual networks of Haramain-Jawi scholars from the 17th to the 19th centuries, continues through the transition toward the institutionalization of traditional *pesantren* and *surau*, and culminates in the emergence of the modern *madrasah* system and Islamic universities from the mid-20th century to the contemporary era.

As the primary analytical tool, the sociological approach draws on the framework of the sociology of knowledge, specifically employing the concept of “objectification of knowledge” proposed by Dale F. Eickelman,⁸ as well as the theory of the bureaucratization of religious authority.⁹ Through this framework, the collected historical data is not interpreted merely as a change in learning methods, but is analyzed as an arena of shifting power relations namely, how scholarly authority, which was previously rooted in personal charisma, transformed into rational-legal authority controlled by state bureaucracy or academic institutions.

⁶ Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor, 2008).

⁷ Louis Reichenhal Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Alfred A. Khof, 1969); Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah, *Kuntowijoyo* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2013).

⁸ Dale F. Eickelman, *Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies* (American Ethnologist, 1992).

⁹ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

The data sources in this study are classified into two categories. Primary sources include foundational literature on the history of Islamic education in the Indonesian archipelago, historiographical records regarding the transmission networks of Southeast Asian ulama's sanad, and documents detailing the curriculum structure of hadith studies, both in traditional institutions of the past and in modern Islamic universities today. Meanwhile, secondary sources were gathered from recent journal articles examining the resilience of pesantren in the digital age, research reports, and authoritative books relevant to the scholarly discourse on Southeast Asian Islam, such as works by Azyumardi Azra,¹⁰ Robert W. Hefner,¹¹ and Martin van Bruinessen.¹²

The data analysis technique was conducted through qualitative content analysis¹³ combined with a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis process was carried out by reducing the textual data, identifying patterns of structural transformation and epistemological shifts, and then synthesizing these findings. The final interpretation aims to construct a comprehensive conceptualization of how modernity and institutionalization have reconstructed the architecture of scholarly authority in hadith, while simultaneously desacralizing the meaning of the *ijazah* within the landscape of Islamic education in Southeast Asia.

Results and Discussion

The Roots of Tradition: Isnad and Personal Authority

To understand the transformation of hadith education, it is crucial for us to first examine the epistemological architecture underpinning the classical tradition, namely the *isnad* (sanad) system and the *talaqqi* method. Etymologically, *isnad* means "support" or "reliance," which in hadith scholarship refers to the chain of narrators that leads us to the *matn* (text) of the hadith. However, in the practice of pre-modern Islamic education, *isnad* transcends its function as an instrument of historical criticism. *Isnad* is the genealogical embodiment of religious authority itself. It is not merely a list of names frozen in the text, but a living intellectual chain connecting a contemporary seeker of knowledge to the highest source of authority: the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴

This concept of *isnad* cannot be separated from the pedagogical method of *talaqqi*, which refers to face-to-face encounters or learning. In the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, written texts are believed to have inherent limitations and to be prone to misinterpretation. True knowledge does not reside on sheets of paper, but rather in the hearts of the scholars. Therefore, the transmission of hadith requires physical interaction through the method of *sama'* (listening to the teacher's recitation) or *qira'ah 'ala al-shaykh* (the student reciting the text

¹⁰ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern "Ulama" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

¹¹ Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*.

¹² Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*.

¹³ Klaus Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013).

¹⁴ Jonathan A.C. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

in front of the teacher for correction).¹⁵ Through the transmission methods of *sama'* (listening to the teacher's recitation) or *qira'ah 'ala al-shaykh* (the student reciting the text in front of the teacher for correction), the student not only absorbs the narration but also precisely matches the manuscript they have copied, letter by letter, with the teacher's original manuscript. It is at this point that a passive text is brought back to life and its authority is validated. Reading hadith texts on one's own without a teacher's guidance was considered an academic flaw at that time, as it eliminated the essential oversight of the text's authority figure.¹⁶

The purpose of compiling general and specific scholarly chains of transmission, as well as issuing scholarly certificates whether certificates of transmission, certificates of scholarly understanding, or certificates of teaching and dissemination is to preserve the scholarly traditions of past scholars and to elucidate their scholarly backgrounds. Thus, the status of the chain of transmission of knowledge or the chain of transmission from a teacher is just as important as that of the hadith chain of transmission; both serve to verify the authenticity of the sources and explanations of both the Qur'an and the Sunnah as transmitted from the lips of the Prophet Muhammad.

It is therefore not surprising that the kiai and ulama who have emerged in various regions of Indonesia typically possess a clear scholarly lineage, a clearly identified teacher, and a solid foundation in Islamic knowledge. They also adhere to more flexible scholarly standards, as this chain of knowledge has undergone a process of transmission that has adapted to each era, each of which has faced its own distinct issues and challenges. The ethics of the kiai and ulama in the process of continuing this chain of transmission align with the guidance of the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, which states that the ulama are the heirs of the Prophets. This means that religious knowledge must be acquired through the ulama, not merely through one's own understanding, let alone limited to textual records. In another hadith, the Prophet Muhammad also explained that Allah takes knowledge away from humanity with the passing of the ulama.¹⁷

As for the sanad, some are documented in writing and others are not. We can observe an example of a documented sanad in the work of KH. Sahal Mahfuz (1937–2014). In the book he authored, *Kitab Faidh al-Hija fi Syarh Nail al-Raja fi Madzumat Safinah an-Naja*, he listed the names of his teachers as the links in the chain of scholarly transmission and intellectual lineage. Recording the sanad, or *tsabat*, is a common practice among great scholars. A sanad that is traced back to the Prophet Muhammad serves as proof of their legitimacy and reinforces their intellectual authority.

In addition to affirming intellectual authority, the sanad also serves as a certificate or legitimization for a student to transmit the knowledge previously imparted by a teacher. Historically, this practice can be observed within Sufi orders. For example, in the sanad of the Khalwatiyah order of Shaykh Yusuf al-Makassari (1626–1699). As a Sufi guide, he wrote a

¹⁵ Abdullah Karim, *Membahas Ilmu-Ilmu Hadis* (Banjarmasin: COMDES Kalimantan, 2005).

¹⁶ William Albert Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

collection of the order's genealogical chains, such as those of the Qadiriyyah, Naqshbandiyyah, Khalwatiyyah, Shadhiliyyah, Kubrawiyyah, Shattariyyah, and other orders. The interconnected nature of these chains of transmission further strengthens the holder's position in carrying out subsequent transmission processes.

A distinctive characteristic of this transmission model is the centrality of personal authority. In the pre-institutional era, the validity of knowledge was not legitimized by the physical structure where the learning process took place whether in a mosque's courtyard, a corner of the market, or the sheikh's private residence. The scholarly institution at that time was the teacher himself. This authority was personal and charismatic in nature and depended heavily on the individual qualities of the scholar, which, in the discipline of hadith, were measured by strict qualitative parameters: *'adalah* (moral integrity, honor, and piety) and *dabt* (perfect accuracy in memorization and meticulousness in maintaining manuscript records). The knowledge being studied was viewed as embodied knowledge (knowledge manifested in the teacher's conduct), not merely a series of cognitive facts.¹⁸

The culmination of this personal relationship between teacher and student is manifested in the awarding of the *ijazah*. Unlike the modern concept of a diploma—issued by a bureaucratic institution as proof of curriculum completion—the traditional *ijazah* is a personal license. When a sheikh grants an *ijazah* to his student—often inscribed on the final page of a manuscript that has been read and verified he is, in essence, enrolling the student's name into his spiritual and intellectual lineage. This *ijazah* does not confirm that the student has “graduated” from a level of schooling, but rather serves as a proclamation that the student is now deemed worthy—morally and academically mature—to shoulder the solemn responsibility of becoming a new link in the chain that will transmit these sacred texts to the next generation. Thus, the relationship that is established is not a transactional academic one limited by credit hour deadlines, but rather a deep, lifelong emotional, devotional (*khidmah*), and hierarchical relationship.¹⁹

Thus, the relationships forged within the traditions of *isnad* and *talaqqi* are not merely academic or transactional, but rather deep emotional, spiritual, and hierarchical bonds. Obedience, devotion, and the pursuit of divine blessings became structural elements in the transmission of knowledge. It was this model of scholarly authority centered on the figure of the teacher that was later brought back to Southeast Asia by the Jawi ulama the term for students from the Indonesian archipelago studying in the Middle East. This system was subsequently replicated and became the foundation for hadith instruction in Salafi *pesantren* and traditional *suraus* across the Indonesian archipelago for centuries, long before the state and modernity introduced the standardized classroom model

The Pre-Institutional Era: The Early Transmission of Hadith in Southeast Asia

The transmission of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia did not develop in a vacuum, but rather was rooted in intensive intellectual connections between this region and the centers

¹⁸ Mudasir, *Ilmu Hadis* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 1999); M. Syuhudi Ismail, *Kaedah Kesahihan Sanad Hadis: Telaah Kritis dan Tinjauan dengan Pendekatan Ilmu Sejarah* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1995).

¹⁹ Brinkley Morris Messick, *The Calligraphic State: Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

of the Islamic world in the Middle East, particularly the Haramain. From the 17th century through the late 19th century, waves of students from the Nusantara collectively known in the Middle East as *Ashab al-Jawiyyin* or the Jawi community played a crucial role as agents of knowledge transmission. They resided for years in the Hijaz, studying directly under leading hadith scholars through the halaqah system at the *Masjid al-Haram* and the *Masjid al-Nabawi*, and then returned to their homeland bearing religious authority in the form of *ijazah riwayat*.²⁰

One of the leading figures in the Nusantara hadith sanad network during this era was Sheikh Mahfudz al-Termasi (d. 1920). He was not only a student but also became the first Jawi scholar recognized for teaching *Sahih al-Bukhari* with a *muttasil sanad* at the *Masjid al-Haram*. Through figures such as al-Termasi and KH Hasyim Asy'ari one of his foremost students who would later found Nahdlatul Ulama, the Middle Eastern isnad tradition was fully transplanted into the socio-religious landscape of Southeast Asia.²¹

In Indonesia, the transplantation of this tradition gave rise to distinctive learning spaces. Knowledge transmission did not take place in formally structured classrooms, but rather in traditional, community-based educational institutions, such as *pesantren* in Java, *surau* in Minangkabau, or *pondok* on the Malay Peninsula and in Pattani. In this premodern ecosystem, learning spaces were organized purely based on the charisma and expertise of the Tuan Guru or Kiai. Places such as mosques, *pesantren*, or the kiai's home were merely secondary facilities; the primary institution was the ulama himself. If a kiai passed away or moved, that scholarly institution would often fade away or relocate with him.²²

The process of transmitting hadith texts ranging from short collections such as *Arba'in al-Nawawi* to the foundational works known as the *Kutub al-Sittah* was carried out through pedagogical methods that directly mirrored the *sama'* and *qira'ah* methods of the Middle East. In the Indonesian archipelago, these methods were localized into the *bandongan* (or *wetonan*) and *sorogan* systems.²³

In the *bandongan* system, the kiai recites the Arabic text of the hadith with precision, while the *santri* listen and interpret it interlinearly in their books. This tradition of interpretation gave rise to an extraordinary linguistic and philological innovation: the use of the Pegon script or the Jawi script, commonly known as *makna gandul*. The “*makna gandul*” method is not merely a free translation but a highly rigorous grammatical analysis; the syntactic function of each Arabic word is broken down into the local language without distorting or altering the structure of the original hadith text.

Meanwhile, in the *sorogan* system, students individually step forward before the kiai to recite the text they have studied, so that the accuracy of their grammatical recitation and their understanding can be evaluated. Both of these methods emphatically underscore a scholarly character that blends orality and textuality. Physical presence in the *majelis* is an absolute requirement for the validity of transmission. A student in the premodern era could not claim to have mastered *Sahih Muslim* simply by possessing a copy of the manuscript in his boarding

²⁰ Michael Francis Laffan, *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Winds* (London: Routledge, 2007).

²¹ Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern “Ulama” in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

²² Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam di Indonesia*.

²³ Ali Mustafa Yaqub, *Kritik Hadis* (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1995).

school room. The text was considered “dead” and non-authoritative until it was recited, corrected, and validated through the teacher’s oral instruction.

Both of these methods underscore the nature of transmission, which relies on the spoken word and hearing. Physical presence at the gathering is an absolute prerequisite for the validity of transmission. A student cannot claim to have mastered Sahih Muslim simply by purchasing and reading the book in his room. The text is considered alive and valid only if it has been authenticated through the teacher’s spoken word.²⁴

Therefore, during this pre-institutional era, mastery of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia relied heavily on the memorization of hadith texts and chains of transmission. Hadith studies were more oriented toward the transmission of sacred texts for the purpose of seeking blessings and preserving the purity of teachings from generation to generation, rather than for historical-critical analysis of the texts themselves. The authority of a hadith scholar in Southeast Asia at that time was measured by how close his chain of transmission was to the Prophet Muhammad, as evidenced by the traditional certificate he brought back from Mecca.

The Wave of Institutionalization of Islamic Education

By the early to mid-20th century, the balance between prehistoric and modern traditions of hadith transmission in Southeast Asia began to be disrupted. Demographic changes, the penetration of colonial administration particularly the Ethical Policy in the Dutch East Indies, which introduced a Western-style tiered school system and the rising tide of Islamic reformism (the Young Muslim/Salafi movement inspired by Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida in Egypt) created immense pressure on Muslim communities to overhaul their educational systems. It was this dynamic that triggered a massive wave of institutionalization in Islamic education a process of bureaucratization and formalization that would later radically transform the face of scholarly authority.²⁵

The initial step in this institutionalization was marked by the transition from the halaqah model to the madrasah system. The madrasah system introduced bureaucratic elements previously foreign to the pesantren or surau traditions: classrooms organized by age and ability level, desks and chairs, blackboards, standardized syllabi, and evaluations based on written exams. The study of hadith, which was previously undertaken from cover to cover (khataman) without rigid time constraints, now had to be segmented, condensed, and adapted to the time allocations determined by the institution.

In the madrasah system, the kiai or Tuan Guru, who was once the “sole holder” of scholarly authority has begun to shift in role to that of a “teacher” or “instructor” (ustaz) who adheres to the school curriculum. This is a crucial shift. Whereas in the past students came to study under a specific figure, in the madrasah era, students enroll to study at an institution.²⁶

The peak of this institutionalization occurred after the independence of Southeast Asian nations, specifically when Islamic education was integrated into the state apparatus (state-sponsored Islamic higher education). In Indonesia, this was marked by the establishment of the State Islamic Institutes (IAIN), many of which have since transformed into State Islamic

²⁴ Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*.

²⁵ Karel A. Steenbrink, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurun Moderen*.

²⁶ Ronald Lukens-Bull, *A Peaceful Jihad Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Universities (UIN), while in Malaysia a similar phenomenon was seen with the establishment of universities such as UIAM (International Islamic University of Malaysia).²⁷

The introduction of hadith studies into Islamic higher education institutions (universities) marked a new chapter in the transmission of knowledge. In the classroom, the science of hadith is no longer represented by the lecturer's chain of transmission, but rather by the syllabus, Semester Credit Units (SKS), and textbooks or lecture notes.²⁸ Students of Hadith studies are not required (and indeed, it is no longer relevant) to memorize the unbroken (muttasil) chain of transmission of Sahih al-Bukhari from their professor. Instead, they are required to take separate courses such as *'Ulum al-Hadith*, *Takhrij al-Hadith*, and *Rijal al-Hadith*, each taught by a different instructor based on an official assignment decree, not on the basis of a traditional isnad certificate.²⁹

Initially, the Hadith Studies programs currently offered at State Islamic Universities (PTKIN) and Private Islamic Universities were still integrated with Qur'anic studies within a single department or program in the Faculty of Shari'ah. Following a policy implemented in 1989, the Hadith Exegesis program was transferred to the Faculty of Ushul al-Din. This move from the Faculty of Sharia to the Faculty of Ushul al-Din had certain consequences: graduates of the Hadith Exegesis program from the Faculty of Sharia could become religious judges, whereas graduates of the Faculty of Ushul al-Din could not. This transfer also implies that the subjects studied in the Tafsir Hadith department differ from those in Sharia, as the former focuses more on examining legal issues within the context of hadith exegesis.

Changes continue to take place. In line with changes in nomenclature at the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, based on Decision No. 1429 of 2012 issued by the Director General of Islamic Education on August 31, 2012, the Tafsir and Hadith (TH) program was renamed to Quranic Studies and Exegesis (IAT) and Hadith Studies (ILHA). This was further reinforced by the Decision of the Director General of Islamic Education No. 3389 of 2013 regarding the Naming of Islamic Higher Education Institutions, Faculties, and Departments at Islamic Higher Education Institutions in 2013, dated December 3, 2013, which has led to a growing trend toward establishing Hadith Studies programs.³⁰

The development of Hadith Studies programs demonstrates that the study of hadith is of great importance within the field of Islamic Studies. Hadith studies differ from Quranic studies and are more complex. Their epistemology is based on the hadith themselves, which consist of the isnad and the matn. Furthermore, hadith studies in Indonesia can be said to remain underdeveloped, as evidenced by the scarcity of published works and research. Although historically, Indonesia has produced many internationally renowned hadith

²⁷ Abdul Rahman Ramadhan Abdul Rahman Ramadhan dan Siti Aisyah Nur Sari Siti Aisyah Nur Sari, "Urgensi Program Studi Ilmu Hadis Pada Perguruan Tinggi Islam Terhadap Penyebaran Hadis Palsu Pada Era Digital Dalam Tinjauan Maqashid Syariah," *AL-ATSAR: Jurnal Ilmu Hadits* 1, no. 1 (Mei 2025): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.37397/al-atsarjurnalilmuhadits.v1i1.268>.

²⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2006).

²⁹ Abdullah Saeed, *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*.

³⁰ Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Prospek Kajian Hadis di Peguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam di Indonesia," *MUTAWATIR* 7, no. 1 (Juni 2017): 192–214, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2017.7.1.192-214>.

scholars, such as Sheikh Yasin al-Fadangi. This phenomenon is caused by the scarcity of scholars or researchers interested in Hadith studies; many still hold misconceptions about the field. Until now, Hadith has been viewed solely as a traditionalist Salafi discipline. There has been a lack of outreach regarding diverse approaches to Hadith studies; until now, such studies have been limited to normative and dogmatic analyses, with insufficient use of empirical-historical approaches. By “empirical-historical,” we mean the study of hadith using the methodological frameworks of the social sciences, such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

This may be in line with the criticism raised by Mohammed Arkoun. He never challenged the established framework of Islamic studies but instead proposed a more empirically oriented paradigm for the study of Islam. In his view, it is necessary to develop Islamic studies that employ a sociological-anthropological-psychological approach to religious texts and manuscripts from the past.

Given the weaknesses that still exist in the hadith program, several opportunities and strategies have been formulated to ensure that the study of hadith remains relevant in the modern era, namely:

a. The Use of Technology in Hadith Studies

The use of technology in hadith studies has brought about significant changes in teaching methods and academic research. The digitization of hadith texts has enabled broader access to classical literature, unrestricted by time and place. With digital platforms such as online hadith databases, researchers can easily locate, compare, and analyze various hadith transmissions from diverse sources. In addition, artificial intelligence (AI) is now being applied to the analysis of hadith chains of transmission and texts. This technology can help identify the authenticity of hadiths more quickly and systematically, as well as detect patterns in chains of transmission that might be difficult to identify manually. Big data also plays a crucial role in hadith research, enabling large-scale analysis by comparing thousands of narrations simultaneously.

Technological advancements also open up opportunities for collaboration among scholars worldwide. Through online seminars, electronic journals, and technology-based academic discussion forums, hadith research can advance more rapidly and incorporate a wider range of perspectives from diverse academic backgrounds. Therefore, the integration of technology into hadith studies not only accelerates the research process but also enhances the accuracy and depth of academic analysis.³¹

b. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The study of hadith is no longer limited to philological analysis and sanad criticism, but can also be developed through an interdisciplinary approach. The integration of hadith studies with other disciplines such as history, anthropology, linguistics, and Islamic law opens up new opportunities for understanding the historical context of hadith as well as its application in various aspects of modern life.

In the field of history, hadith can be studied by tracing the social and political background of the period in which they were transmitted, thereby providing a more comprehensive

³¹ Muhammad Alfatih Suryadilaga, “Kajian Hadis di Era Global,” *Esensia*, 2014.

understanding of the hadith's context. Meanwhile, in the field of anthropology, hadith can be analyzed based on cultural practices in various Muslim communities, enabling a richer study of how hadith are understood and applied in daily life. In linguistics, hadith research can employ linguistic analysis to understand the meaning of hadith more accurately, particularly when examining differences in language usage across various hadith narrations. In Islamic law, hadith serves as a primary source for the formulation of Islamic law; thus, an interdisciplinary approach involving legal studies can clarify the relevance and application of hadith in the context of contemporary law.³²

Through this interdisciplinary collaboration, the study of hadith is not merely a field focused on the criticism of sanad and matan, but also has a broader impact across various aspects of scholarship and social life. This approach opens up opportunities for more in-depth and comprehensive research, and ensures that hadith remains relevant in addressing the challenges of the modern era.

The Impact of Transformation on the Transmission of Hadith Knowledge

The institutionalization of Islamic education and the incorporation of hadith studies into the modern curriculum, particularly at Islamic universities have profound structural and epistemological consequences. This transformation does not merely represent a change in the setting or methods of learning; rather, it triggers a fundamental shift in how knowledge is validated, constructed, and transmitted. The impact of this transformation can be mapped into three main dimensions: the redefinition of the authority of the *ijazah*, textualization and methodological shifts, and the tension between accessibility and the loss of spiritual connection.

1. From the Ijazah Riwayat to the Academic Degree

The most obvious impact of institutionalization is a shift in the meaning and function of the *ijazah*. In the classical *isnad* tradition, the *ijazah riwayat* is a personal and spiritual license signifying that a student is genealogically connected to his teacher's scholarly lineage, tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad. This authority is inherent in the teacher's person and speech. However, in the modern educational system, the meaning of the *ijazah* has been reduced to a mere diploma or academic certificate.

The legitimacy of a hadith scholar in the modern era is no longer determined by who their teacher is or how close their *isnad* chain is (*'uluww al-isnad*), but rather by institutional seals, program accreditation, and academic degrees conferred by the state or an institution.³³ Scholarly authority has undergone bureaucratization. A professor of hadith studies at a university derives their legitimacy through an Appointment Decree issued by the university president or a ministry, rather than through an organic transmission of knowledge. This shift effectively moves the center of truth validation from the individual scholar to the bureaucratic institution.

³² Jajang A Rohmana, "Pendekatan Antropologi dalam Studi Living Hadis di Indonesia: Sebuah Kajian Awal," *Jurnal Studi Hadis, Keindonesiaan, dan Integrasi Keilmuan*, 2015.

³³ Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

2. The Objectification of Knowledge: Textualization and Critical Analysis

The second impact concerns the epistemological aspects of the science of hadith itself. Dale F. Eickelman (1992) refers to this phenomenon in modern education as the catalyst for the “objectification of knowledge,” in which religion (including hadith texts) began to be viewed as a structured, rational, and questionable subject of study, rather than merely a set of dogmas accepted as taken-for-granted.

In traditional institutions of the past, hadith were transmitted primarily to preserve the textual integrity of the texts and for *tabarruk*. However, in modern Islamic universities, rote memorization has been replaced by textual and contextual analysis. Students are systematically taught the methodologies of hadith criticism.³⁴ They are required not merely to accept the authenticity of a hadith based solely on classical texts, but are encouraged to conduct *takhrij al-hadith* independently, analyze the reliability of narrators, and to examine the *asbab al-wurud* using sociological, anthropological, and discourse analysis approaches.³⁵

This is supported by advances in printing technology and, now, digitization, which make primary hadith texts instantly accessible without the need for a sheikh’s guidance. Hadith scholarship has undergone extreme textualization it has become detached from the teacher’s oral tradition and has fully transformed into a passive text on paper or a screen, ready to be critically analyzed in the classroom or academic laboratory.

3. Accessibility vs. the Desacralization of Relationships

The third impact is the emergence of a paradox between the democratization of access and the desacralization of relationships. On the one hand, institutionalization has made the study of hadith highly democratic and inclusive. In the past, only select santri who had the time, perseverance, and a special closeness to the kiai could access a comprehensive study of the foundational texts. Now, anyone who passes a college entrance exam has an equal right to study *‘Ulum al-Hadith*. Knowledge is no longer monopolized by an elite group of kiai or the descendants of specific ulama.

However, on the other hand, this democratization comes at the expense of the esoteric dimension of the isnad tradition. Modern classrooms are designed with an emphasis on time efficiency and graduation requirements. The relationship between instructors and students has become an academic-transactional one, rather than a relationship of *khidmah* and *mahabbah* as in the *talaqqi* tradition.³⁶ Absolute obedience and the proper etiquette of seeking knowledge which in the past were prerequisites for the transfer of knowledge tend to fade. Faculty members are not responsible for the spiritual transformation of their students; their duty ends once the syllabus has been delivered and exams have been graded. Thus, although the cognitive transmission of hadith knowledge may have become more precise and analytical in the modern era, its spiritual dimension which was once firmly woven together by the threads of isnad has suffered a paralysis or desacralization.

³⁴ Kamaruddin Amin, *Isnad Cum Matn Analysis in Search of A New Methodology* (Jakarta: Pustaka Mapan, 2008).

³⁵ Kamaruddin Amin, *Menguji Kembali Keakuratan Metode Kritik Hadis* (Jakarta: Hikmah, 2009).

³⁶ Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*.

Conclusion

The transformation of the transmission of hadith scholarship in Southeast Asia, from the isnad tradition toward modern institutionalization is not merely a change in the setting and methods of teaching, but a fundamental shift in epistemology and the architecture of religious authority. In premodern times, the validity of knowledge rested absolutely on the charismatic authority of the ulama and the genealogical relationships represented through isnad and ijazah. However, with the establishment of madrasahs and Islamic universities, the center of authority shifted radically toward academic bureaucracy.

This shift carries dual and paradoxical implications. On the one hand, institutionalization has succeeded in democratizing access to hadith scholarship within a broader public sphere and has fostered the emergence of a sharp historical-critical analytical approach. On the other hand, this process has triggered the desacralization of scholarly relationships; the spiritual bond and obedience between teacher and student have gradually faded, while the meaning of the ijazah has been reduced from a spiritual license to merely a formal certificate of completion.

Ultimately, the transmission of hadith knowledge in contemporary Islamic education in Southeast Asia stands at the intersection of modern rationality and traditional roots. The greatest challenge for Islamic educational institutions moving forward is how to conduct analytical and objective hadith studies without completely losing the spirit and spiritual connectivity of the isnad tradition, which for centuries has served as the guardian of the heart of Islamic scholarship.

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