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Reconciling Islamic Faith and Modern Values: Muhammadiyah's Perspective in Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract

This article analyses Muhammadiyah's contribution towards progressive Islamic thought in Southeast Asia and its popularity in Indonesia and Malaysia. Utilising the constructivist approach to theory synthesis, and drawing on theories of faith, modernity and Islamic reformation this article considers how Muhammadiyah has attempted to contextualise its version of Islam to correspond with the requirements of modern-day society. Literature should be classically reviewed to investigate the connection between Islamic concepts and modern life, in all aspects of society within a variety of sociocultural settings. The findings indicate that Muhammadiyah's has succeeded in integrating traditional Islamic norms with modern ones, through the organization's educational, healthcare and social activities. And do the community and society as a whole a lot of good. Whilst conservative interests and ideological differences from more than just global Muslims have attempted to halt Muhammadiyah in reforming what they perceive to be their goals, it has been able to do so. It also has a strong orientation to social justice, pluralism and working with people of other faiths. It is an example of long-term Islamic reform, one that respects religious rules while dealing with the real and pressing issues of today. The research shows that Muhammadiyah not only helps Muslims seeking solutions for real problems but also serves as a progressive framework concerning the development and modernization of Islam more generally. Muhammadiyah is still very much shaping how Muslims speak to each other today. It provides a conservative but open-minded and forward-looking perspective of Islam.

Keywords: Indonesian, Islamic Faith, Malaysian, Modern Values, Muhammadiyah, Perspective.

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest Muslim majority population in the world. With this demographic, several Islamic-oriented organizations have emerged. Nearly 100 million Indonesians are affiliated with one of two main Islamic civil organizations: the Islamic Modernist Muhammadiyah and the Islamic Traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (1). This paper describes the influence of Islamic modernist ideas and the rapid growth of Muhammadiyah institution in cities across Indonesia prompting traditionalist ulama, or Islamic scholars, to form Nahdlatul Ulama the name translates as 'revival of the ulama'—to protect the network of traditionalist pesantren in rural and suburban areas. Furthermore, not only in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah has now also developed in Malaysia (2).

Muhammadiyah's is widely recognized as a reformist (tajdid) movement. Its da'wah activities are manifested in various sectors such as education, health, social welfare, and the economy, as Muhammadiyah's avoids involvement in practical politics and channels its mission through its charitable enterprises Muhammadiyah's Charitable Enterprises (3). In the field of education, for instance, it has established schools and universities. These Muhammadiyah's Charitable Enterprises institutions are not only organizational entities but also embody the spirit of the Islamic movement in offering practical solutions to the everyday problems faced by the Muslim community. Furthermore, Muhammadiyah's charitable orientation is closely tied to the theology of Surah Al-Ma'un, initiated by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, who taught his students that understanding and memorizing the Qur'an must be accompanied by practical application (1).

This effort is proven by Muhammadiyah's da'wah carried out through formal and non-formal education, namely through tiered educational institutions and discussion circles to religious studies. Until now, Muhammadiyah's has had at least 3 educational institutions abroad, namely Egypt, Australia and Malaysia. Muhammadiyah's da'wah in Malaysia has also been going on for a long time. Muhammadiyah's Special Branch

Leadership Malaysia as Muhammadiyah's da'wah infrastructure in Malaysia has been established since 2007. Over time, Muhammadiyah's Malaysia's da'wah activities have expanded to various sectors such as the zakat movement through LazisMu Malaysia, the humanitarian movement under Muhammadiyah's Disaster Management Center Malaysia and the da'wah movement based on religious studies and discussions directly under the auspices of Muhammadiyah's Special Branch Leadership Malaysia (4).

For another example, in Malaysia, Muhammadiyah developed educational institutions through the Muhammadiyah Special Branch Leadership Malaysia which actively promotes education and da'wah abroad. In addition to establishing Universiti Muhammadiyah Antarbangsa Malaysia as a higher education institution, Muhammadiyah Special Branch Leadership Malaysia also manages the Community Learning Activity Center Sanggar Bimbingan. This Community Learning Activity Center functions as a non-formal educational institution that serves the Indonesian diaspora community in Malaysia, especially the children of Indonesian migrant workers who have difficulty accessing formal education (5).

Unlike its generally progressive image in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah is sometimes perceived by segments of the Muslim community in Malaysia as a conservative and even radical movement. This narrow construct, which has been moulded by the Malaysian education system, is widely accepted by Malaysians. The majority of Malaysian Shafi'is prefer exclusiveness, which would, e.g., imply that scholars need to be from the correct academy in this area if specialized in professional training courses. When this type of exclusivity spills over into religious activities, it can result in being labelled a social outcast and maybe torture for refusing to conform to what the government expects. Yet the chorus of intellectuals, largely politicians and protestors among younger generations in recent years, is pushing back against these boundaries to demand more inclusiveness on issues of religious rights (6). As a reformist organisation for Islamic learning, it reformed the approach to teaching Islam by introducing secular sciences in madrasas and providing them with a model of complete education (ta'lim) meant for enabling individuals

to cope with their day-to-day life. It doesn't just emphasise, as we do, that education is important for spiritual development; it simply cannot compromise on education, and not only does it have to be comprehensive, but it must also be all-sided. Similarly, when looking at the alternative, if their role is merely restricted to being seen as isolated from social and professional interactions, there are Muslims who can bring about change in different areas. Muhammadiyah, on the other hand, has a uniform and comprehensive model of education that presents an ideal mixture between religious and secular education, where one should be complementary to the other. It demands contemporary Islamic education that is up to the international standard and rich in religious values (7).

The movement seeks to revive science and knowledge under human supervision according to Islamic precepts, as an alternative means of grappling with the problems of modern life. Education in this view is not simply transferring knowledge that has already been acquired. It regards it as a deliberate and purposeful sequential tour among scientific discoveries that juxtaposes scientific knowledge with profound moral and social responsibility. In this context, students are expected to be responsible and honest, think critically and become specialists in their major-subject area. We do not aim to form intellectuals, but people who are intelligent and possess character. These men should lead its society and be guides of freedom in wisdom and might.

Muhammadiyah's unique and progressive interpretation of Islamic education has given it a modern, internationally competitive brand that is deeply religious at the same time. Since then, because they are committed to intellectual growth, social activities and adjusting to events of the day, Muhammadiyah has successfully functioned as a genuine bridge between Islamic history and the current reality of Southeast Asia. Muhammadiyah serves as a demonstration of how the two distinct ways of being, religious and modern, are not parallel tracks that never intersect each other; they entwine with each other. It shows, that is, that education isn't just about teaching citizens how to think; it's also about teaching them how to make moral choices and readying their minds for judgment in the real world.

An important side Muhammadiyah education is trained to think above beliefs and local culture. The movement isn't out to make people feel like they have to follow rigid rules and customs. This is not about being a discipline freak; it's simply being open to new thoughts and new ways of doing things that do not contradict those of today. This is a space in which what is eternal and timeless about Islamic concepts remains alive and is employed to think through contemporary problems. Muhammadiyah is seen as one possible nugget of that Islam line taking tradition and nudging it into something, well, modern and useful. By translating progressive ideas into concrete plans of action, it has made a name for itself among Indonesians and inspired new reformist Islamic movements throughout the region (8).

The global ummah (all Muslims) is brought back to coloniality rather than a meaningfully resistant movement by these premodern experiences of disaster in Muhammadiyah. This recent catastrophe at Muhammadiyah reminds me of a godforsaken experience: one in which its words and meanings seem to be caught up by the vibes that come with secularisation. How, then, does it settle within this fixed framework if advancement is to remain on pause? Its forward-looking interpretation and the diversity of Islam it embodies have long been in question by both external and internal factors: Can these eventually be combined into some kind of coherent and unified philosophy?

The attacks of political fanatics in the name of reform are confined to the area of reform itself, whereas Islamic tabarra'at have already become common property throughout the world. It is the zeal it did not have and from which correspondingly, the hoped for religious fervor in our age will be as a hard row to hoe. There will, at minimum, be an open question of what is possible and desirable. Only these tensions within Muhammadiyah are visible as of today. It's really a matter of how as society and politics do change quickly indeed.

This will be the main focus of this study: how far Muhammadiyah has been successful in propagating and cultivating progressive Islamic thoughts outside Indonesia (especially Southeast Asia); with examples drawn from the host country in two-way processes of exchange and adaptation (where there are some new criticalistik competitions), as opposed to major domination models depicting Indonesian influence unidirectionally. programs on higher education have already been launched, and Malaysia, where a focal institution of Muhammadiyah can also be found at Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This study hopes to prove that Muhammadiyah's perspective of Progressive Islam hold in its basic principles and idea, in practice are struggle of various kinds under the form of educational reform and fair health service policies.

This research is conducted to explore the internal and external factors with which Muhammadiyah has previously to reconciled Islam and science. The study will also consider how Islam has internationalised in Southeast Asia as it does so. This critique seeks to demonstrate that such a linear-sounding take on progressive Islam is rather an "easy interpretation" and one should consider it as an alternate and more opposing stance towards addressing modern social problems from an Islamic standpoint.

From the introduction that has been described, a problem can be identified, namely. It asks how Muhammadiyah navigates the tension between its progressive Islamic perspective and the growing influence of conservative attitudes within traditional Muslim societies in Indonesia and Malaysia. It further examines the extent to which Muhammadiyah can maintain the relevance of its progressive Islamic teachings amidst increasingly polarized social and political dynamics in both countries. Another question is how Muhammadiyah manages to adhere to religious doctrines while updating Islamic teachings to address global destruction, such as climate change, gender equality and social development. Lastly, the study looks at Muhammadiyah's contribution to Islamic reform in Southeast Asia without replicating Indonesian cultural hegemony, and how moonlighting as a source of local identity intersects with the principles of universal Islam.

The central research problem of this study emerges from the growing tension between Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic vision and the rising tide of religious conservatism in Indonesia and Malaysia. Theoretically, Muhammadiyah represents an autochthonous model of Islamic modernity grounded in *ijtihād, tajdīd*, rationality, and ethical renewal. However, empirical developments in Southeast Asia show

that conservative religious actors, politicised identity narratives, and exclusive doctrinal frameworks increasingly challenge reformist Islamic discourses. In Indonesia, Muhammadiyah is generally embraced as a modernist force contributing to education, social welfare, and public ethics, whereas in Malaysia, segments of the Muslim community often misinterpret it as a conservative or even radical movement due to entrenched madhhab exclusivism and state-influenced religious norms. These contrasting socio-religious landscapes raise crucial questions about how Muhammadiyah adapts, negotiates, and maintains the relevance of its progressive Islamic teachings across different cultural and political contexts. Moreover, the organisation must reconcile its commitment to religious authenticity with the urgent need to address global challenge such as climate change, gender equity, and social development without being perceived as undermining tradition. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how Muhammadiyah navigates these theoretical and empirical tensions, and how its reformist ideals can continue to shape Islamic thought and practice in an increasingly polarised Southeast Asian environment.

This study concentrates on the moral & educational influence of Muhammadiyah in Southeast Asia, like Indonesia in particular, as part of the development and progression of progressive Islamic thoughts and practices. And this will also consider the movement's broader impact on Islamic reform movements in Southeast Asia and globally. Through a detailed examination of Muhammadiyah's principles, applications, and challenges, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential for progressive Islam to address modern societal issues while staying grounded in traditional Islamic values.

Methodology

This study utilizes a conceptual research design employing the Theory Synthesis method, which seeks to combine diverse theoretical viewpoints and bodies of literature into a unified conceptual framework. The project is defined as a study of history, ideas, and institutions in the preeminent modern Indonesian Muslim organisation, Muhammadiyah. This method makes it possible to generate new or refined insights by bringing together ideas previously considered unrelated and even contradictory (9).

This study complements the conceptual Theory Synthesis design with empirical data collection from three principal sources—documents, interviews, and archives (Figure 1) referring here to institutionally preserved historical records used as primary data. Documents include organizational regulations, bylaws, policy briefs, annual reports, strategic plans, AIK curricula, and program records in education, healthcare, and social welfare across Muhammadiyah units in Indonesia and Malaysia; interviews are semi-structured with leaders/ officials, academics, and managers of Muhammadiyah charitable enterprises, including leadership interviews totalling n=8 (Indonesia: n=5; Malaysia: n=3); archives comprise founding deeds, meeting minutes, circular letters, communiqués, press releases, and media coverage held by Muhammadiyah institutions and public repositories. Data collection took place from April until July 2025. Collection procedures comprised institutional repository and official-site searches, requests for authenticated copies where necessary, archival access via formal letters and scheduled visits with metadata logging (date, origin, author), and interviews conducted in Indonesian or Malay or English with audio recording (upon consent), verbatim transcription, anonymisation, and reflexive. Memoing; where relevant, surveys were used to complement interviews to capture perceptions of Progressive Islam practice and institutional modernisation. Inclusion criteria required participants to be ≥18 years and currently or previously (≥2 years) engaged in Muhammadiyah leadership/management, academic roles, or programme implementation in Indonesia or Malaysia; documents analysed were official or internal publications from 2000–2025 relevant to education, healthcare, social welfare, economy, environment, or governance; archival materials had verified provenance and directly concerned Muhammadiyah's reformist activities in both countries. Reliability and validity were ensured through source- and context-level triangulation (documents–interviews–archives; Indonesia–Malaysia), a detailed audit trail of decisions, and sampling or instrument or coding logs, member checking by returning interview summaries to informants for confirmation/ clarification, inter-rater reliability on ≥20% of

transcripts (Cohen's kappa computed and discrepancies reconciled), and researcher reflexivity on positionality and potential bias. Ethical compliance followed institutional review-board approvals, informed consent, confidentiallity, anonymisation, and data storage per guideline We will interpret these while allowing primary sources, supplemented by theological perspectives, to offer numerous insights into how Muhammadiyah perceives its leaders. The Muhammadiyah Research Team will also talk to Muhammadiyah leaders, officials, and scholars, and we will collect primary data, including scattered references, theoretical points, and political/religious observations, as well as current field information directly related to our study.

Data Analysis Technique

This method seeks a structure that reveals distinct gaps derived from multiple sources by interlinking disparate elements of presentation into a cohesive argumentative narrative that integrates diverse ideas and events. These base asserts that the potential for genuine progressivity in thought-writing would be established. Data can be obtained from academic sources, which may or may not exhibit a discernible pattern. First, one gathers and then carefully mixes together carefully chosen inputs to give the argument a strong theoretical grounding. Following established protocol, transparency in the analysis at every stage, rigor in clarity, scholarly perseverance, and ethical consideration will be integrated at each level. Lastly, Muhammadiyah's attempts to bring faith and modernity together in Indonesia and Malaysia have more general theoretical implications (9).
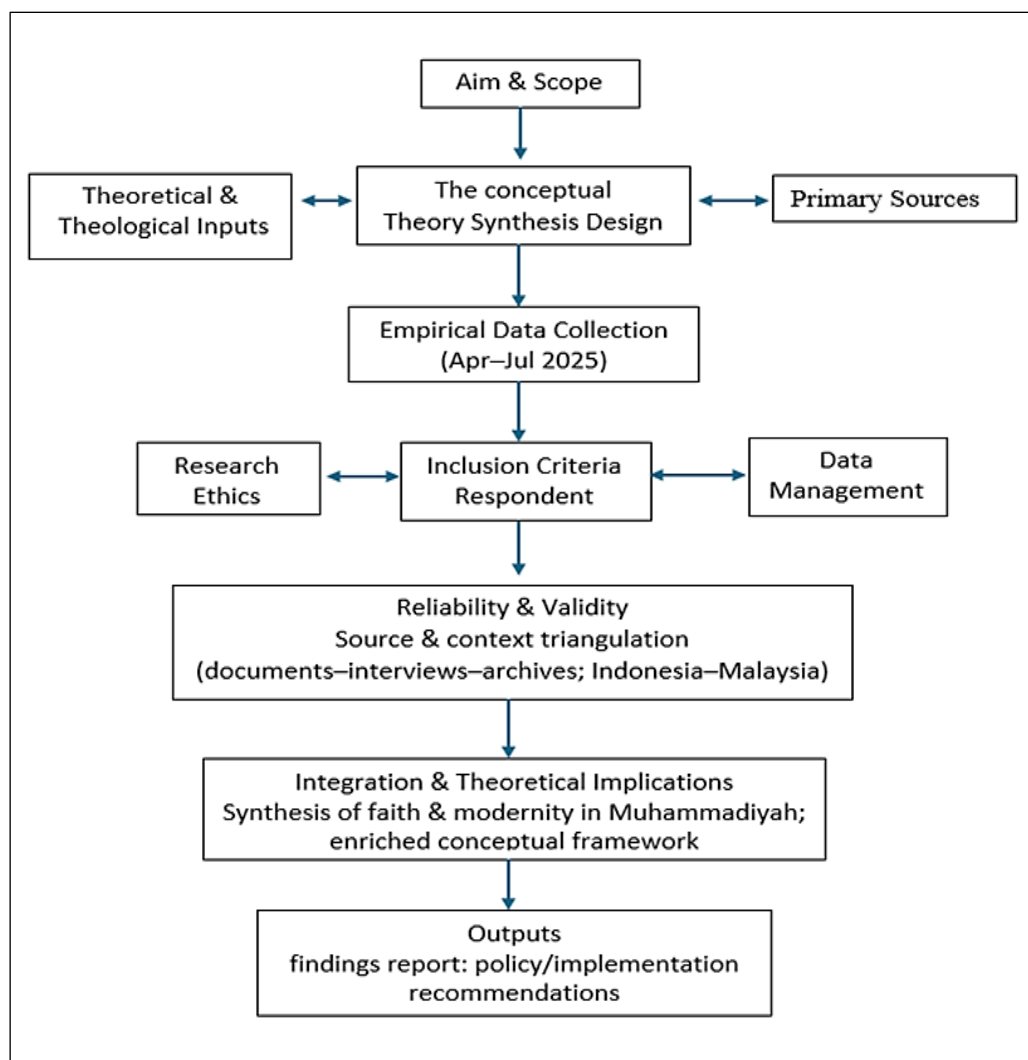

Figure 1: Research Design Flowchart for the Study "Reconciling Islamic Faith and Modern Values: Muhammadiyah's Perspective in Indonesia and Malaysia"

The rationale for selecting Indonesia and Malaysia appears to be rooted in their significance within Muhammadiyah's regional influence and the contrasting social and political contexts that shape its activities. Indonesia, as the birthplace of Muhammadiyah, provides a foundational context for understanding its principles and practices. Malaysia, where Muhammadiyah has established institutions and engaged in transnational exchanges, offers a comparative perspective on how Muhammadiyah's progressive Islamic ideas are adapted and received outside Indonesia. This comparison helps to highlight the movement's ability to navigate different socio-cultural environments and maintain its relevance across borders.

Results and Discussion
Historical and Theological Background: Reformism as Autochthonous Modernity in Islam

To strengthen the argument on Muhammadiyah's distinctive approach to modernity, it is important to note that its reformist orientation differs significantly from other influential Islamic movements in Indonesia and Malaysia. Unlike **Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)** in Indonesia which generally embraces a culturally rooted traditionalism through the preservation of pesantren networks and local religious practices Muhammadiyah adopts a more rationalist and scripturalist framework that emphasises purification, education modernisation, and the integration of scientific knowledge. In the Malaysian context, Muhammadiyah's approach also contrasts with that of **traditionalist** *Shafi'i* oriented groups, which tend to prioritise legal conformity and adherence to established scholarly lineages. By promoting ijtihād, institutional modernisation, and socially oriented charitable enterprises, Muhammadiyah offers a model of Islamic modernity that is both progressive and pragmatic. This comparison highlights Muhammadiyah's unique contribution as a reform movement able to harmonise faith, modern knowledge, and social transformation across Southeast Asia.

At the turn of the century, the reformation turned into Indigenous Modernity. The first part of the twentieth century witnessed a shift in global religious and secular ideas: from within, modernist Islamic movements began to take shape, gradually accommodating Islamic theological principles with the growing requirements of contemporary existence. Muhammad Abduh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Rashid Rida are some of the central figures in this movement. People who stress that we must use reason to investigate, returning to the primary sources of Islam for study, and all this occurs with engagement in the real world (6).

Their thoughts also had a broader impact in the Muslim world, especially Southeast Asia. In this way, under the command of Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, who was from Muhammadiyah, there are also changes and adaptations that were significant in Indonesia as a part of Southeast Asia, but with its own environment and enough differences to be distinct. He was first exposed to modernist ideas on a trip to Mecca, where the reformist sentiments that were growing in the Muslim world as a whole were clearly evident then. And after this, his further studies in Cairo brought him much closer to straightening modernist writ Islamically but not through intercourse with Cairo's praetorian modernism. There can be references to Muhammad Abduh in this connection, who said that reform must be based on reason, and it was time for the Qur'an and Sunnah teachings to get back to their original purport (10).

Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan took these reformist ideas with a skeptical awareness of his own. Hence, he used some for himself. Meanwhile, he adapts like himself and modifies the Bibliography style that suits Indonesian Muslims who are under colonial rule per an architectural style fashioned by both the indigenous Indonesian and Islamicites. For Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, it was something else. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who transplant models of reform from the Arabic world, he wanted instead to mold an ethical and spiritual Islam to suit Indonesian society perfectly. Not limited solely to revivalism in dogma, the reform programs he fostered included education, social welfare, health, and socialist political action that targeted a dozen hot present issues around society. While keen on popularizing religious knowledge to help Indonesians rise out of their cultural decadence, Balfas was also criticized for his teaching-centered approach at the expense of divine inspiration by others who thought it strange that he had used Western forms to think through traditional Islamic thought (11). In Indonesia, he

wants to create an Islam that unites allegiance and proactive configuration, citing a well-adjusted union of religious meditation on the material world (12).

KH Ahmad Dahlan's view of Islam was greatly shaped by the cultural setting in Southeast Asia, which is known for its diverse traditions and a good balance between problems and opportunities. The reform movement was evolving into what could be described as native modernity. Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan's decentralised vision of Islam was profoundly shaped by the cultural milieu in which he operated, characterised by a complex interplay of cultural traditions and unstable power dynamics in Southeast Asia. Not by imposing Islamic thought from the Arab world as a whole, but by reinterpreting and reconstructing Islamic concepts to align with the societal realities of that era. He understood how important local culture was and tried to promote it along Islamic lines, especially in places where superstition and syncretism were strong. He (KH Ahmad Dahlan) was involved in social issues and cared about the welfare of marginalised people as well as moral reform. But his reformist vision was ecclesial and social, motivated by a desire to see Islam as an emancipatory force for justice and progress at the grassroots level (13).

KH Haji Ahmad Dahlan was deeply convinced that Islam was a total life system that is crucial for the making of a just and civilized nation. He attempted to make this vision a reality by founding Muhammadiyah schools at all educational levels, which would provide religious education alongside "modern" subjects in order to prepare students for a world that was no longer exclusively modern. His vision of an educational course was beyond just the dissemination of information, with education being seen as "instrument to form moral character and sense of social responsibility", he wishes to contribute in nurturing who are cast in intellect and spirit matured" - which reflects through Ex-Cardinal's own memoirs (14). Dahlan was also extremely critical of mysticism and superstition, choosing for himself a social based practical path. His concern for the public often led him to start at free clinics, colleges and self-supporting food centers (many were setup along with the government, non-government agencies) Theological Import of Reformist Tradition in Muhammadiyah. Theologically speaking, Muham-

madiyah's reformist tradition may be considered a localised version of modernity that is loyal to Islamic teachings while open and responsive to other opinions. Instead of simply copying foreign models, Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan developed his vision in response to its own cultural and historical context of Southeast Asia, and more specifically the issues of colonialism and religious pluralism (15). Muhammadiyah was established in 1912, city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia and has been a central force of religious renewal and reformation in Indonesian Islam. Dahlan reiterated that Islamic engagement shall be rational, knowledge based and oriented at resolving human misery. This vision has developed in line with global changes over the centuries, but it is still based on the principles of renewal (tajdīd) and reform (iṣlāḥ). The thing is the result of Muhammadiyah's ongoing work to keep Islam relevant and adaptable in modern life (16).

Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, Kyai Haji Ibrahim, Kyai Haji Mas Mansur, and King Kyai Haji Hisyam led the way for Muhammadiyah to grow as strong and freely as it still does today. A common goal of modernization, as well as ideas and building organizations, also played a role in the founding of Muhammadiyah's schools and social events. Because of these efforts, Muhammadiyah, which started as a small movement, is now Indonesia's largest and most powerful religious group (17).

Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan's Spreading the Seeds of Education and Social Welfare

Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan has established a robust foundation for a progressive, moderate framework of Islam. An interpretation that positions values as the foundation of liberation and ethics as a guiding principle. He believed that Islam is a living religion that can adapt to the challenges of the modern world. He wanted to combine traditional Islamic learning with modern science. From that point of view, the idea was introduced and became a central part of Muhammadiyah's efforts to reform and grow a mental link between moral cleanliness and mental growth. Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan viewed changes not as sources of concern but as opportunities to rejuvenate Islamic thought at its foundations (18). He framed Muhammadiyah as a movement that would help society adapt to real progress without becoming secular by encouraging critical dialogue, moral virtue, social engagement, and changing people's behaviour.

For Southeast Asia, Muhammadiyah embodies a non-derivative Islamic modernity that is neither merely imitative of the West nor a mere replication of Arab culture. It does not, however, stem from an advanced interpretation of content; instead, it emerges from local conditions and regional necessities. This reformist discourse reassesses classical Islamic thought through the lens of modernity, seeking to establish a non-Western modernity (19). Muhammadiyah has been able to stay around as an Islamist group because it found a way to balance the need for change with cultural and intellectual trends in Southeast Asia. It has been able to show a modern view of Islam without losing touch with its roots.

Theological Minimalism, Ethical Maximalism

The theological orthodoxy of Muhammadiyah is based on the idea of tawhid, which means the belief in the oneness of God. This is the basis of faith and social morality. This is the foundation of faith and social ethics. This principle plays on the organisation's tactics when it sets out to identify true Islamic practices from deviations. Inhabiting a minimalist theological field, Muhammadiyah maintains that what matters is the essence of worship. It seeks to purify worship by removing anything not ordained by God; it regards *bid'ah* (religious innovations) and *khurāfāt* (superstitions) as contaminators that displace unreality for reality (16). Historically, the organization has opposed certain Sufi practices and branches of spiritual philosophy: *ittihād, hulūl,* and *wahdat al-wujūd*, which it sees as an equation of God with human beings incompatible with the Qur'an and Sunnah. Yet Muhammadiyah does not entirely reject Sufism: it recognises the ethical and spiritual qualities of the Sufi orders, as far as these are consonant with the unity of God and noble conduct. It does not require a person to be bound by one particular Sufi order (20).

Due to its beliefs in minimal theology, Muhammadiyah is not a sign of social withdrawal or rejection of modernity. Instead, the movement brings an ethical standard of maximalism to its social responsibility, community development, and public service. It feels strongly that religion must be expressed not just through word and sight but also in tangible actions socially beneficial to all mankind, such as education, healthcare, or social convenience. Muhammadiyah believes that Allah's teachings must be followed, so it insists on dealing with modern social issues from an Islamic spiritual point of view instead of just following traditional interpretations.

The theological foundation of Muhammadiyah is *tawḥīd*, or the belief in the oneness of God. The goal of the movement was to make changes to all parts of life. Ijtihad, or using independent reasoning in Islamic law, is the most important theological principle for Muhammadiyah today. This approach will allow for the flexibility to both adapt and interpret Islamic teachings in response to evolving social conditions. By reinterpreting Islamic basic teachings, Muhammadiyah seeks a dynamic solution—an appeal to address contemporary issues. This method is closely related to the idea of *tajdīd* (renewal), which is the basis for Muhammadiyah's belief that Islamic thought must always be able to adapt to new situations and the major changes that happen in people's lives over time.

This approach promotes a lifestyle in which Islamic belief is fluid and expansive, rather than confined by strict limitations. Because of this, Muhammadiyah theology tries to be flexible with the needs of the modern world and was not originally opposed to Islamic orthodoxy. This is the theological basis that supports Muhammadiyah's progressive views on many issues, including education, gender equality, environmental protection, and public health. The movement's roots are in education, and it doesn't see learning as just a way for people to get ahead. Instead, it sees learning as a force in society that changes how we solve problems at home and abroad. As an advocate for gender equality, it conflicts with well-established cultural values and patriarchal structures through a call for women's rights and participation in all spheres of public life (21). Muhammadiyah's view on environmental ethics also includes that all persons have a responsibility together to protect the Earth (22).

Muhammadiyah Seeks to Reconcile Progressive Islamic Thought with the Growing Conservatism Present in Traditional Muslim Communities Across Southeast Asia

One of Indonesia's premier Islamic organisations faces problems in reconciling its modern, reformist interpretation of Islam with the conservative input

that local life gives it. Its progressiveness, appropriately so, is not in the "modernization" that necessitates stripping people of their culture and identity to fit a mold closer to colonization, but through its education reform, social justice innovation, and being educated in 'Science' with Islam (23). However, these efforts often encounter resistance from conservative interpretations that prioritise preserving long-standing traditions and show reluctance toward modernity. These efforts, on the other hand, are met with a conservative mindset that values the status quo and is wary of anything new (24).

The fundamental conviction of Muhammadiyah as a reformist group is that it should focus on education to bring Islam back to life. Muhammadiyah was one of the first movements to bring modern science and social studies into the heads of religious schools, but this was part of a process of secularization. This shows that it was a smart move to make Islamic education more modern. These programs try to combine religion and modern knowledge so that they become one system of education that gets students ready for their time. These changes aim to make a model of Islamic education that is flexible and can change, but still follows the basic ideas of Muhammadiyah, *tajdīd* (renewal), and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning).

With this all-around approach, kids will get a whole education that will help them deal with the problems that come with globalization and urbanization while still keeping their Islamic religion. Muhammadiyah believes that Islam is a living tradition that has changed over time, not something that has always been the same. It values change and thinks that fresh ideas are needed to suit the requirements of today.   This method of thinking is quite similar to the core ideals of the movement, which are tajdīd (renewal), taḥqīq (verification), and tarjīḥ (adaptation).

Muhammadiyah is helping to build a progressive and open-minded Muslim community in Indonesia by combining Islamic values with new ideas in education, health care, and social welfare. These projects are meant to help the organization keep up with the times while still following its principles. The *Tajdīd* and the *Tarjīḥ* as a New "Strategic Planning" for the Reform of "Muhammadiyah." *Tajdīd* and *tarjīḥ* are strategic frameworks of Muhammadiyah in encountering modern situation; the Muhammadiyah's reformation is reasoning (structural) but also adheres to the context. Tarjih: A System of Legal Thought by Which Islamic jurisprudence applies to the problems of contemporary society (25). This is considered from the aspect of Muhammadiyah's education programs, in which technology and innovation have been applied to grow a student-oriented curriculum (26).

But the moment conditions change, then you need to slant one way. The very heart of the matter is that Muhammadiyah may have a vision noir that anticipates change, but it struggles against many obstacles as modern technology develops by leaps and bounds and transnational Islamic movements (which refute nationalism) throb around them in noisy protest. But the decision, by the way, is that Muhammadiyah and its umma make it as possible to propose a policy by realisation. As a sensitive issue in the discourse of emergent spiritualities and religions, however, Muhammadiyah is consistent with its adherence to *ijtihād.* The movement also knows that its message needs to be in line with morals and ethics. As a reformist group, Muhammadiyah even values the variety and richness of the Islamic tradition (27).

Muhammadiyah works for social justice as well as education. The campaigns are based on the Islamic values of fairness, justice, and decency. Islamic morals are the basis for all programs that help women, make health care better, and cut down on poverty. These efforts are part of a larger movement among Islamic non-profit groups that use their moral and religious strength to fix social problems (28). And this is not specific to Muhammadiyah, but it's a general movement that demands justice and equality as the basic foundation for social behaviour.

Despite its progressive tendencies, Muhammadiyah is currently experiencing more and more resistance from conservative elements inside the Muslim community following Indonesia's political transition. To some others, Muhammadiyah's reformism constitutes deviance from traditional religious practices. The movement argues that *ijtihād* is necessary to protect Islamic values from becoming irrelevant or inactive in a modern context. Their main concern is whether or not secular knowledge will bring religion into, which they fear would destroy its purity (16). The growing politicisation of religion has made things

even more difficult, as conservative figures use religious feelings more and more to get people to support them. They want people to go back to following strict traditional interpretations of Islam. As reformers gain more power, the gap between them and those who want to keep things the way they are has grown. Muhammadiyah, which promotes a moderate form of Islam that supports peaceful coexistence and accepts values that are not Islamic, is up against strong conservative opposition (29). In this way, Muhammadiyah is facing these questions, and its strategy is to shorten the distance between progressive Islamic thought and conservative circles. It is a reform movement that, unlike exclusivist doctrines of the past, will give you an expanded view and model of religious openness as people who thought for themselves and reflected on their scriptures for light upon their lives as actors in carrying out their faiths.

As previous research has revealed, researchers found that Muhammadiyah designed for Indonesia a way of life that is compatible with the state (dar al-'ahd) and that all creatures can bear witness to the truth (dar al-shahādah), what we now call the "theologizing of democracy." This effort aimed to make Islamic tradition relevant in a way that would allow democratic life to flourish. This was a common idea across Middle Eastern civilizations; the Iranian leadership believed that their "nation," their "heritage," represented itself unparalleled in medieval European thought. This was Muhammadiyah's way of addressing this issue: it sought to bring progressive Islamic thought closer to conservatives (30).

The idea that Indonesians may be loyal and devoted is a unique but uplifting response to the deep sadness that is affecting people all across the world, even in Mumbai, India. It offers a remedy for the political exploitation of religious identity that afflicts numerous cultures in contemporary society. For Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's second largest Muslim sect, the movement offers a way to follow the moral teachings of Islam. The movement's mission statement is based on the values of justice ('adl), compassion (raḥmah), and standing with those who are hurting (ummah). This manner of thinking comes from the historical and religious roots of Muhammadiyah, which were based on the desire to change how Islam thought and ruled. They provide a lot of different services, such as education, public health, and social services. Their purpose is to restore back the spirit of neighborliness and make it possible for an ummah to live in a fair and wealthy environment (31). These initiatives have been inspired by Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan's beliefs and the tenets of Islam progressing (Progressive Islam), which reinterprets religious values in relation to contemporary developmental contexts. With application to social issues of the principle, Muhammadiyah has been able to reconcile progressivism with Islamic morality. This strategy has lessened conservative backlash and is evidence that reform is not un-Islamic. The result is a richer, more coherent vision of Islam's place in the modern world.

Muhammadiyah has always believed that everyone has the right to an education, even people who are socially disadvantaged and deserve the same opportunities as everyone else. Its sister institutions are designed to foster intellectual growth and critical thinking, viewing the integration of religious and contemporary sciences as a perpetual phenomenon (24). It has been a helpful learning experience that helps students grow both academically and morally. Muhammadiyah's appeal to Indonesian Muslims is at least partly due to its strong commitment to social justice and the common good. This is one reason why so many people are interested in the rise of Muhammadiyah again.

The most extensive "peace initiative" to bring together conservative and leftist Muslim groups was started by Muhammadiyah. In addition to this, they made the conditions ideal for changing the way schools work. It has brought back the "counsel" of conservative wisdom into the greater conversation about reform by using conventional terminology to talk about proposals for change and encouraging conservatives to give their opinion. This is important for bringing people together in the community and finding solutions to the problems of today. Muhammadiyah seeks a synthesis between tradition and modern difficulties, adhering to the dual norms of mutual respect and collaboration in both contexts of conceptual Islam creation.

The Significance of Progressive Islamic Teachings in a Polarised Social and Political Context

Southeast Asia has been embroiled in conflict over this so-called moral crisis for several years, with

Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines being the most vocal. Previous research has indicated that one of the main reasons for this fragmentation is the rise of conservative Islamic movements, which have grown alongside the spread of Islamic ideas around the world. This change is not occurring in a vacuum; rather, it fits within a larger trend of identity politics and how social media has made transnational religious narratives more popular worldwide (32).

In Indonesia and Malaysia, as in several regions globally, more radical interpretations of Islam have gained prevalence in public discourse, facilitating decision-making for individuals. Acknowledging this conservative transition, it may be imperative to clarify a reorganization of religion, society, and state (33). Identity politics, frequently rooted in religious and ethnic affiliations, has emerged as the primary driver of political conflict. As this reasoning becomes more common in politics, campaigns focus more and more on symbolic appeals that make social divisions worse. This trend is happening at the same time as the growth of radical Islamic groups who use transnational networks and internet to spread their power beyond the borders of nation-states (34). Subsequently, the worldwide spread of radical Islamic ideas has become a serious security problem in the region, especially because of cross-border extremist networks that are linked to groups like IS. Some areas of southern Thailand, some parts of the southern Philippines, and certain places in Indonesia are still at risk of becoming flashpoints for radical recruitment and ideological penetration. They use religious identity as a weapon to get people involved in politics and to build competing schools of thought. The fact that these broken stories are being spread more widely and distorted is what makes the following more diffuse, unpredictable, polarizing, and dangerous across the region (35).

This changing situation is making it harder for reformist Islamic groups like Muhammadiyah to do their work. It is hard to promote an Islamic discourse that is both progressive and acceptable when conservative religious forces are coming back and global trends are clear. As a result, there is a need for more cooperation between countries in the region, especially when it comes to sharing intelligence, fighting terrorism, and community-based programs that stop people from becoming radicalized and bring people together (36).

I think that the secret to Muhammadiyah's continued relevance is its willingness to accept everyone, regardless of their religious or ideological beliefs. Muhammadiyah is known for its work in social welfare, education, and a moderate view of Islam. It is credited with helping Indonesia grow and become a leader in these areas in Southeast Asia. Its open-minded and reform-oriented approach to Islam affects so many communities that its efforts to revitalize the religion are both possible and believable. Muhammadiyah does not make everyone believe the same thing; instead, it encourages discussion and agreement. This makes it a stronger mediator against the use of religion for political purposes in these troubled times.

Tackling Global Challenges Rooted in Islamic Values

The Muhammadiyah community has shown us that Islamic values can lead to good and useful behaviour. They have tried to fix problems that affect the whole world, like climate change, social justice, and equality for everyone. The *khilāfah* idea says that people are responsible for taking care of what God made. Muhammadiyah is a religious group that works to protect the environment and give women equal rights, among other things. These kinds of actions show that faith is not just a personal belief; it can change and save the world we live in.

The Muhammadiyah Climate Centre is a great example of how much the Muhammadiyah cares about the environment. Their actions show that they really believe that people should follow more than just the usual rules of behaviour, which are divine principles. The Muhammadiyah Climate Centre wants people to take action on climate change based on what Islam says. They do this by using religious language to promote sustainable farming, discourage polluting sources of energy, and encourage the protection of wildlife. The Muhammadiyah Climate Center is based on the idea that taking care of the environment is not just a political or environmental issue, but an ethical duty that everyone should share.

The Muhammadiyah Climate Center is based on the strong belief that protecting the environment is not just a political issue of general eco-evangelism, but an ethical duty that everyone can

understand and relate to. It means more than just technical language; it also means hospitality, the warmth of the hearth, and spiritual humility. The beauty and wonder of the earth makes us feel small in front of the Creator. The whole place is really nice, with shimmering groves that look like silver screens and lone trees with their backs to you on a gentle hillside.

For Muhammadiyah Climate Centre, such places are more than just scenery they are sacred reminders for humanity to dwell according to divine principle and not human habit (37). It's not just about science and technology Muhammadiyah integrates Islamic ethics into the global narrative of sustainability. Via the Muhammadiyah Climate Centre, it has introduced a wide range of initiatives such as giving charity for recycling waste, establishing adiwiyata schools that specialise in environmental education and digital campaigns to increase awareness and receptiveness towards sustainable life. These initiatives have transformed the Muhammadiyah Climate Centre into a pivotal player at the local, as well as global level, in environmental solutions and how faith-based initiatives can make a difference in the fight against ecological destruction (38). The Muhammadiyah Climate Center, has been a major player in solving environmental problems, both in its own country and around the world. The work of Muhammadiyah shows how closely Islamic values and modern environmental needs are linked. This makes them a big part of faith-based climate action.

Muhammadiyah has joined other groups, like its women's group 'Aisyiyah, in speaking out for gender equality. Since the group started, it has worked to get more women involved in politics, education, and health care. This is like the spirit of working together that is common in Muhammadiyah as a whole. 'Aisyiyah thinks it is their religious duty to protect and promote women's rights. Their beliefs are based on Islamic teachings. Its work has largely emphasised maternal health, reproductive rights and the economic participation of women. These are actions that have brought about change throughout Indonesia: from improved access for girls to education and health care, to the growing number of women in governance decisions Muhammadiyah's dedication to social justice is reflected in the Islamic principles of 'adl (justice),

rahmah (compassion) and ummah (solidarity). These principles underlie much of the social programming which seeks to challenge poverty, discrimination and human rights abuses and empower those who are excluded. Through the cases of healthcare, poverty alleviation and advocacy for the poor, I discuss how Muhammadiyah instrumentalises Islamic duties to support social well-being as a good. As a non-discriminating and non-judgmental service organization, it provides the society with what is needed to advance a more equitable society or redress social economic inequities within and outside Indonesia.

The values of Islamic modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia contain elements of renewal that maintain the essence of universal Islamic teachings and are appropriate to the socio-cultural context of each country. In Indonesia, the values of Islamic modernity put forward by figures such as Nurcholish Madjid emphasize the need to move beyond rigid traditions and adopt values that are rational, open, tolerant, egalitarian, and oriented toward humanity and social justice. Modern Islam in Indonesia also prioritizes a critical attitude in responding to changing times while maintaining the sanctity of religious teachings and combining universal Islamic values with local wisdom and Pancasila as the foundation of the nation and state. In Malaysia, Islam, as the official state religion, also encourages the implementation of modern values through the integration of Islamic values into the social and political systems. The country has developed a democratic model that incorporates Islamic values and a Sharia-compliant financial system. Malaysia also prioritizes religious freedom while upholding moderate and inclusive Islamic principles that support peace and societal unity. Islamic modernity in Malaysia encompasses efforts to adapt Islam to the modern era without losing its Islamic identity.

Islamic modernity is a dynamic response to changing times that prioritizes dialogue between Islamic values and scientific progress, and rejects a narrow textualist approach, as thinkers such as Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman promoted inclusive and dialogical thinking in modern Islam. Thus, the values of Islamic modernity in Indonesia and Malaysia reflect the adaptation of Islamic teachings oriented towards progress, pluralism, and social justice within the cultural and political

frameworks of each country while adhering to the universal and transcendent essence of religion.

Muhammadiyah and the Islamic Reform Movement in Southeast Asia

Recent Developments. The growth of Muhammadiyah has been a major aspect of the reformist Islamic movements in Southeast Asia. It has been able to deal with the strong local ties of one of Indonesia's leading Islamic groups by being open to the world. Some people say that its power comes from Indonesia's cultural dominance in the area, but Muhammadiyah has smartly made itself a key player in progressive Islamic thought around the world. Its efforts to promote a pluralist and reform-friendly Islam around the world are rising, thanks to strategic alliances and local programs. These works bring individuals from diverse countries together and add to the conversation about Islamic moral standards, the Renaissance (tajdīd), or how to make society better (39).

Muhammadiyah is getting more and more well-known since it collaborates with groups from other nations and deals with problems that impact all Muslims around the world. These links enabled the group promote an Islamic vision that maintained faithful to its roots while also changing with the times. By emphasizing on social justice, inclusion, and interfaith communication, Muhammadiyah has made itself a stronger link between the old-fashioned way of thinking in Islam and the requirements of today's society. It is also a good idea for Muhammadiyah to challenge the strong orthodox stance while keeping strictly modernist, which means being open to changes in social and economic life and local cultures at the moment (40).

The increasing international power of Muhammadiyah is, at some level, obtained through collaborations with international organizations and plays an active role in the global agenda regarding Muslim civilization. They have given the group working delegations and a means through which to articulate an Islamic view that is both rooted in tradition and also thoughtfully confronting the problems of contemporary life.

In recent years, Muhammadiyah has grown even more significant as a bridge between Islam's intellectual traditions and the modern globalized world by persisting with efforts on social justice, inclusivity, and dialogue among faiths. In this singular position, Muhammadiyah can not only contribute constructively to global Islamic conversations, but also challenge regressive orthodoxies. It advocates a reform-based approach that integrates cultural references and emerging ethical principles, longitudinally illustrating how renewal in Islam can be at once situational and principled in relation to the vicissitudes of modernity.

Conclusion

In Indonesia and Southeast Asia, Muhammadiyah is the most important moderate group. Islamic voice: "The group has done a great job of balancing the eternal principles of Islam with the needs of today." It is a model of religious thought that is firmly based in theology and can be used in many different areas of social development. Muhammadiyah has not only helped local communities grow, but it has also been a part of bigger international talks about how to modernize Islam by focusing on social reform through education and welfare. It goes beyond national borders and shows how reform based on tradition can help us find new ways to solve the big problems of this century.

3rd: Muhammadiyah is the most important moderate Islamic group in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. The group has a great ability to adapt to the contemporary needs and the everlasting principles of Islam. It is a religious ideal that is founded on theology and can be used to help society improve. Muhammadiyah has built not only local communities but also taken part in larger transnational talks about Islamic revival by focusing on social transformation through education and welfare. It crosses national borders and shows how a reform based on tradition may come up with new ways to solve big challenges in our century.

The way things were done in Indonesia and Southeast Asia also helped Muhammadiyah become one of the strongest moderate Islamic movements in Indonesia and the region. It can connect old Islamic principles to issues that people face today. Its faith is strong, but its ideas are what will make the world a better place. Muhammadiyah has constructed contemporary urban communities and become a prominent role in global talks about how to modernize Islam after initiating educational and humanitarian operations. Using tradition to make changes is a

good technique to handle problems now because it works in all cultures.

When they hear a familiar song from a single bird in the fall, people often stop and listen for a while. Getting conservative forces and progressive actors in the Muslim world to actually work together is one of Muhammadiyah's long-term aims. Future research might focus on: examining the mechanisms through which Muhammadiyah can increase its global reach and assessing how its reformist tenets might shape wider discourses of social justice, pluralism and religious renaissance. Given that it continues to mix Islamic teachings with the problems of modern life, the organisation has an excellent chance of having a major influence on Islamic thought and practice in an increasingly interconnected world.

Abbreviations

MCE: Muhammadiyah Charitable Enterprises, PCIM: Muhammadiyah Special Branch Leadership, MDMC: Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center, PKBM: Community Learning Activity Center, TKI: Indonesian Migrant Worker, KH: Kyai Haji, IS: Islamic State, MCC: Muhammadiyah Climate Centre.

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Author Contributions

Mamdukh Budiman: conceived of the study, planned how to perform it, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript, Sohirin Mohammad Solihin: contributed to the design of the study, analysis of data, and rewriting the manuscript, Zubaidi Wahyono: formulated the theoretical work and made a substantial contribution to criticism and improvement of the discussion section.

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The study employed AI assisted technologies in the process of rechecking grammar and English.

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