IN SEARCH OF A DISTINCTIVE PARADIGM FOR INDONESIAN
ISLAMIC STUDIES: SOME NOTES FROM 13TH AICIS 2013

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Introduction

These notes represent my personal reflection and observation on various aspects of the organization of 13th Annual International Conference on Islamic Studies (AICIS) held in November, 18-21, 2013 in Senggigi Beach, Mataram-Lombok, known as Pulau Seribu Masjid (an Island with a Thousand Mosques). These notes also reflect my opinion on the ideas as well as arguments proposed, discussed, and exposed during the conference by national and international active participants and speakers.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge that the conference that was jointly organized by Directorate General of Islamic Education of Ministry of Religious Affairs (MORA) and Mataram State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN Mataram) was a very successful one. The success was made possible by a good cooperation and full commitment of the two institutions. I observed during the conference that the organizers were hand in hand, supporting one another and working tirelessly to prepare and manage the conference.

The conference was officially opened by Minister of Religious Affairs, Suryadharma Ali and attended by distinguished guests, including Zainul Majdi, Governor of West Nusa Tenggara, Head of West Nusa Tenggara Parliament, Director General of Islamic Education, Rector of Institute Agama Islam Negeri (IAINs) or State Institutes of Islamic Studies and Universitas Islam negeri (UINs) or State Islamic Universities, and Head of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAINS) or Islamic Colleges. The opening ceremony was very impressive. It was quiescence but very entertaining. The audiences was cheered by unique and dynamics local dances and music.

In its 13th birthday, AICIS seems to have really become an international event of Indonesian Islamic studies. It has attracted speakers and participants from many parts of the world, including Whitney A. Bauman (Florida International University, USA), Maryam Ait Ahmed (IbnThufayl University, Morocco), Angelika Neuwirth (Freie Universitat Berlin, Germany), Kevin W. Fogg, Ph.D, (University of Oxford, England), Loretta Pyles, Ph.D (Professor Social Welfare, University at Albany, New York), Elmir Colen, Ph.D. (Director of Islamic Finance, Melbourne University, Australia), Maria Toufiq (Morocco). Some visitors from Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand were also actively participating in the conference. This
annual event also seems to have become a favorite and competitive event for scholars of Indonesian Islamic Studies. Muhammad Zen, coordinator of the organizing committee, disclosed to the press that 900 papers were sent to the organizer and only 128 of them were selected for presentation.

The Objectives

According to Director of Islamic Higher Education, H. Dede Rosyada, AICIS aims “to produce Islamic researchers and thinkers who have the competency and self-esteem to perform on world stage, in order to introduce the distinctive features of Indonesian Islamic studies and the development of Indonesian Muslims.” (See http://diktis.kemenag.go.id). The researchers and scholars, Pak Dede explains, are expected “to share their latest researches” and “play bigger role in responding the problems faced by modern societies, and introduce the concepts of Islamic knowledge for solving them.” See http://diktis.kemenag.go.id. In my observation, the 13th AICIS provided dynamic forums for scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies and their international counterparts to present, share, discuss, review, and develop their academic works. They reflect and review the progress of academic works on Indonesian Islam.

My observation of 13th AICIS and the previous ones makes me believe that this annual event can be a bridging line for the academic works of different generations of scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies in term of the focus, methodology, authenticity, uniqueness, and contribution of their works. It allows the participants to identify some key or fundamental aspects and dimensions of changes and continuity in the development of Indonesian Islamic studies from generation to generation of scholars.

Certainly, for young scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies, AICIS can be a stepping stone to start an academic career. It can provide them with an opportunity to introduce their works, examine their authenticity, and define their future areas of academic interests, as well as clarify their academic road map, sharpen the focuses of their researches, establish the platform for their academic career, and develop their academic networking. For scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies who are in the peak of their academic career, AICIS can provide them with an opportunity to examine the originality, authenticity, acceptability, and contribution of their works to the development of Indonesian Islamic studies. This annual event can also provide them with an opportunity to refine their approaches, improve their methodology, sharpen their focuses, and expand their academic networking. For senior or experienced scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies, AICIS can provide an opportunity to share their academic experiences and perspectives with younger scholars, to inspire them with original and relevant ideas for future researches. More importantly, AICIS can provide them with an opportunity to nurture strong academic tradition among younger generation of scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies.

With good management and strong commitment among the organizers and the participants, I am sure that AICIS will continuously strengthen the tradition of Indonesian Islamic studies, inspire scholars with new ideas, and provide the authorities and managers of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, especially the Heads of STAINs and Rectors
of IAINs as well as UINs, with an overview of the past, the present, and the future development of Islamic studies, so that they can develop strategic plans for improving the quality and quantity of programs on Islamic studies.

For international scholars, AICIS can provide them with an overview of the contemporary development of Indonesian Islamic studies, gives them an opportunity to share international perspectives to Indonesian audiences, and initiate or strengthen academic partnership with Indonesian scholars and Islamic higher education institutions.

The Main Theme

The main theme of 13th AICIS in Mataram is “Distinctive Paradigm of Indonesian Islamic Studies; Towards the Renaissance of Islamic Civilization.” This theme seems to reflect a collective view among speakers and participants of the conference, that Indonesian Islam is unique in many ways and thus, requires a unique approach to understand, explain, and review it. The main theme also reflects a belief that Indonesian Islam has the potentials and strengths to be a good model for the revival of Islamic civilization.

Indeed, some papers discussed in many sessions of the conference suggest that historically and sociologically Indonesian Islam has experienced dynamic relations and interactions with Islam from many different cultural backgrounds. It has been exposed to many types of Islamic traditions from various parts of the world, particularly the Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia, East Asia, and Africa. The traditions have contributed to the formation of the tradition of Indonesian Islam. They have made Indonesian Islam so diverse and unique. Therefore, some speakers suggested in the conference, better understanding, description, and explanation of the tradition of Indonesian Islam cannot be developed by a common paradigm borrowed from Middle Eastern or Western tradition of Islamic studies. It requires a distinctive and unique Indonesian paradigm.

It is clear from the main theme that the main mission of 13th AICIS was to explore, identify, and define a suitable, workable, and reliable paradigm for discussing, understanding, and explaining Indonesian Islam. Such a paradigm is believed to be urgently needed to avoid misperception, misunderstanding, miscalculation, and misleading explanation of Indonesian Islam. Therefore, some speakers of 13th AICIS urged scholars of Indonesian Islam to pay serious attention on the paradigmatic aspects of their researches. In this way, they believe the scholars can sharpen their focuses, refine their approaches, and produce better discussion or analysis of Indonesian Islam. In a long term, the objective 13th AICIS is to trigger “paradigm shift” in Indonesian Islamic studies.

According to Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) in his idea of “scientific paradigm” discussed in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), "successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science." (p. 12) With regard to its main theme and mission, 13th AICIS may indicate that Indonesian Islamic sudies is dynamic and begins to reach its maturity stage. According to Kuhn (1962), a
need for paradigm shift occurs when scientists encounter unsolvable anomalies and a current paradigm is being challenged, so that a scientific discipline is thrown into a state of crisis.

It can be implied from this perspective that in the light of its main theme and missions, 13th AICIS reflects a sense of anomalies and crisis in contemporary Indonesian Islamic studies. There seems to be a common perspective among speakers and participants that current paradigm of Indonesian Islamic studies needs to be thoroughly evaluated or criticized in order to pave the way for paradigm shift. Indeed, there seems to be widespread unhappiness with the dominance of the use of normative approach or bayani tradition adopted from Middle Eastern Islamic studies. The use of such an approach is blamed to be most responsible for the emergence of “narrow minded” and “self-fulfilling truth” in the attitude of the scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies. Such an approach is also blamed to be most responsible for the spread of misleading explanation and misunderstanding of Indonesian Islam.

Keynote Speakers

The organizer of 13th AICIS invited two keynote speakers, to inspire the participants in discussing and developing ideas related to the main theme. The two keynote speakers are very familiar faces among scholars Indonesian Islamic studies: Professor Dr. Azyumardi Azra, MA and Professor Dr. Abdul Malik Fadjar, M.Pd.

Professor Abdul Malik Fadjar is a leading Muslim scholar with many academic and professional experiences. He was born in Yogyakarta on February 22, 1939 and being exposed to both religious and general higher education systems. In 1972, he finished his undergraduate study at Sunan Ampel State Institute of Islamic Studies in Malang. From 1979-1981 Malik Fadjar was at Florida State University, USA, doing Master of Science with major in International/Intercultural Development Education.

Malik Fadjar is highly achieving in both academic and political career. From 1983 to 2000 he was Rector of Muhammadiyah University in Malang; from 1998 to 1999 he was Minister of Religious Affairs; and from 2001 to 2004 Malik Fadjar was Minister of National Education. Now, he is a Professor of educational studies at Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta with main research interests and publications on Islamic educational issues.

Professor Azyumardi Azra was born in Lubuk Alung, West Sumatera on March 4, 1955. He graduated from Department of Arabic Teaching, Syarif Hidayatullah State Institute of Islamic Studies for undergraduate program and from Department of History, Columbia University in 1992 for Magister program. Azyumardi is one of key scholars and resource persons of Indonesian Islamic studies with extensive international academic and professional reputation. He is prominent as one of Indonesian public intellectuals, Muslim thinker, and a prolific book writer. His publications and research interests cover Islamic historical, sociological, educational, and political experiences.

This former Rector of State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta (1998-2006) is a member of the Advisory Board of a number of international organizations, such as
United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) and International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). In 1998, Azyumardi was elected as a member of National Committee of Indonesian History. In the same year, he was selected as a member of the International Association of Historian of Asia (IAHA). From 2004 to 2009, Azyumardi was a Professional Fellow, University of Melbourne, and in 2007, he was elected as the Director of Graduate School, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta, Indonesia. From 2007 to 2009, he was Deputy Secretary of Vice President for Social Affairs.

Azyumardi is also well known for his international reputation in promoting inter-religious harmony for which he becomes the first Indonesian who receives “the commander of the order of the British empire (cbe award) from Queen Elizabeth of England.

In Indonesia, Azyumardi is one of the most acknowledged scholars for his thoughts in Islamic studies. He is one of the only three scholars from Islamic Higher Education Institutions, together with Professor Amin Abdullah of UIN Yogyakarta and Professor Mazda Muzdalifa of UIN Jakarta, who are accepted as the members of Akademi Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (AIPI), Indonesian Academy for Sciences, the most prestigious academy in the country.

The Contexts

Discussions of the importance of paradigm shift in the study of Indonesian Islam has been a regular agenda among Muslim scholars in the country for the last two decades. The discussions have inspired some ideas for renewal, such as “Islam kultural ((cultural Islam)” by Abdurrahman Wahid; “Islam alternatif (alternative Islam)” by Jalaluddin Rahmat; “reaktualisasi ajaran Islam (reactualization of Islamic teaching)” by Munawir Syadzali; “membumikan al-Qur’an (bringing al-Qur’an down to earth)”, by Quresy Shihab; “Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspek (Viewing Islam from various aspects)”, by Harun Nasution; “Islam moderate (Wasattiyyah Islam)” by Azyumardi Azra; “Keislaman dan Keindonesiaan” by Nurcholis Madjid; and “Islam inklusif” by Alwi Shihab. Below, some of the ideas will be briefly highlighted.

This idea, *Islam Ditinjau dari Berbagai Aspek*, was introduced by Harun Nasution or Pak Harun (1919-1998), one of the most influential scholars in Indonesian Islamic studies in the 80s. Pak Harun is a former Rector of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta and widely known as one of the proponents of rationalist approach in Islamic studies. For him, Indonesian Muslims need to be rational, open minded, moderate, and flexible. With this perspective, Pak Harun is known as the key person in the formation of inter-religious forum in Indonesia. In his view, the use of a critical, analytical, comparative, objective, and comprehensive approach in Islamic studies can be very crucial for the development of Indonesian Islamic studies. He often warns his students and his colleagues in various occasions that being narrow minded in understanding and explaining Islam can lead to misunderstanding of Islamic teachings.

Another idea, *Reaktualisasi Ajaran Islam* (Reactualization of Islamic Teachings) was introduced by Munawir Syadzali or Pak Munawir, Minister of Religious Affairs from 1983 to
1993. Focusing on Islamic legal thoughts, Pak Munawir stresses the shortcomings of literal and textual interpretation of Islamic norms as stated in the Qur’an, Sunnahs, and books of fiqh, and the urgency of empirical and contextual interpretation of the norms. For him, ijtihad and historical as well as sociological analysis is fundamental in the development of Islamic legal thoughts.

The third renewal idea is introduced by another strong proponent of Indonesian Islamic studies, Nurcholis Madjid or Cak Nur (1939-2005). In his academic works, Cak Nur continuously and consistently promotes the uniqueness of Indonesian Islam. For him, Islam and Indonesia are two faces of a coin. Islam has characterized Indonesia and vice versa. Therefore, he suggests, Indonesian Islam cannot be understood without sufficient understanding of Indonesian values and culture and vice versa. Key issues in the works of Cak Nur are the idea of “secularization,” “pluralism,” and “religious freedom.” These ideas, he explains, reflect the national concept of unity and diversity (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika). For Cak Nur, Islam is a comprehensive system of life that must not be reduced into political ideology. This view is represented in his controversial idea, “Islam yes, Partai Islam no.”

The fourth renewal idea is Islam Kultural (Cultural Islam) introduced by Abdurrahman Wahid whose nick name is Gus Dur (19940-2009). For Gus Dur, Indonesian culture and Indonesian Islam develop together and characterize one another. For him, Indonesia Islam cannot be understood without sufficient knowledge of Indonesian culture and vice versa. Gus Dur rejects the endorsement of Islam in politics and suggests that Islam must not be considered as an alternative ideology, but must be considered only as one of ideological elements that complement the idea of Indonesia.

As can be implied from these ideas, Indonesian Islamic studies are dynamic and continuously producing new ideas and searching new paradigm. Although being different in their focuses and arguments, the scholars are continuously pushing paradigm shift for Indonesian Islamic studies. Contemporary discussions of the paradigm of Indonesian Islamic studies tends to focus on the idea of knowledge integration and interconnection. This idea is continuously circulated and disseminated among scholars in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly at State Islamic University in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Malang.

In Jakarta State Islamic University, Professor Azyumardi Azra and his colleagues have constantly criticized the use of normative approach as in Middle Eastern Islamic studies. For them, such an approach is responsible for the development and spread of narrow minded and self-fulfilling truth among Muslims. In their view, the development of Indonesian Islam has been shaped, not only by normative values, but also by sociological, anthropological, economic, historical, and political values as well as experiences. Therefore, they argue, empirical and multidisciplinary approaches are very important for Indonesian Islamic studies. They believe that combining such approaches with the normative ones will produce better understandings of Indonesian Islam.

In Yogyakarta, Professor Amin Abdullah and his colleagues have continuously and consistently been introducing the concept of knowledge integration and interconnection for Indonesian Islamic studies. The concept is visualized in the form of a rather complicated
Jarring Lava-lava (The Spider Nets). In line with Azyumardi, Amin Abdullah emphasizes the importance of multidisciplinary approach. In particular, he stresses the relevance of anthropological as well as economic approaches to Indonesian Islamic studies. For Pak Amin, approaches to Islamic studies need to be shifted from “dichotomistics-atomistics” to “integrative-interdisciplinary.”

Amin Abdullah also introduces the use of hermeneutics approach for Indonesian Islamic studies. For him, general and religious knowledge need to be epistemologically integrated, to produce better understanding of religious issues. In his view, “fixed religion” needs to be reconciled with “a dynamics world.” In this regard, he suggests, ulum al-din, al-fikr al-Islamiy, and dirasat Islamiyyah must be connected, not separated or juxtaposed. With this perspective, he discusses the connection between “Islamic hermeneutics” and “pop culture” and the use of “hermeneutics approach in the study of religious fatwa.”

In many discussions and presentations Pak Amin urges Muslim scholars to balance the authority of texts and salaf with the authority of natural sciences (kauniyyah), aql (aqliyyah), and intuition (wijdaniyyah). According to him, bayan or textual tradition is unable to respond the sociological and cultural reality of religion. Such a tradition, he criticizes, tends to be dogmatic, defensive, apologetic, and polemical. The tradition, he argues, only produces al-ilm al-taufiqi, not al-ilm al-huduri and al-ilm al husuli. The reason, he explains, because in bayani tradition aql is always negatively perceived and only used to justify the authority of texts, not to assess the relevance and contexts of the texts to real life experiences. Bayani tradition, he further criticizes, puts too much emphasis on qiyaṣ al’illah for fiqh and qiyaṣ al-dalalah for kalam. For Pak Amin, Bayani tradition is overwhelmed with textual-lughawiyyah epistemology (al-asl wa al-far; al-lafz wa al-makna) and lack of attention on contextual-bahtsiyyah epistemology as well as irfaniyyah-batiniyya epistemology. For a better understanding and explanation of Islamic tradition, Pak Amin suggests scholars of Islamic studies to pay more attention on burhani and irfani epistemology in their works.

In Malang, Professor Imam Suprayogo has adopted a more practical and functional approach to the idea of knowledge integration. In State Islamic University of Maulana Malik Ibrahim where he bases his academic works, Imam Suprayogo introduces the concept of Knowledge Tree (Pohon Ilmu), a structure of a body of knowledge with the branches that are considered to be fundamentally related and supporting one another for developing strong Islamic intellectual tradition. For such a tradition, Pak Imam explains, Muslim scholars need to be equally well exposed to both religious and scientific tradition.

These few examples reflect a growing desire and continuous efforts among scholars to push paradigm shift in Indonesian Islamic studies. I am aware that more names and thoughts can be mentioned in the discussion. But due to limited time, I am sorry to share with you few names only. I believe that further review of other names will inspire us with some ideas to explore, question, criticize, construct, and develop better paradigm for Indonesian Islamic studies.
Key Points

The 13th AICIS reemphasized the idea of paradigm shift for Indonesian Islamic studies and promoted collective awareness and common perspective on the importance of the idea. The conference suggests that the paradigm of Indonesian Islamic studies needs to identify, reflect, and represent the historical, sociological, anthropological, and cultural experiences as well as the main characteristics of Indonesian Islam. It also suggests that Indonesian Islam is pluralistic and moderate (wasattiyyah) in character, and therefore, its paradigm needs to be contextual and relevant to these characteristics. It was widely believed in the conference that a distinctive paradigm for Indonesian Islamic studies can be developed through a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the unique characteristics of Indonesian Islam. It can not be developed through adapting or adopting or mimicking or simply following the paradigm of Middle Eastern or Western tradition of Islamic studies.

In this regard, the conference further suggests that Indonesian Islamic studies needs to combine normative and empirical studies with multidisciplinary approaches. Scientific principles as applied in various modern disciplines of social, natural, and humanity sciences need to be carefully and critically combined with Islamic normative values as suggested in the Qur’an and Sunnah. Such a combination can be represented in a model of “knowledge integration,” namely integration between religious and scientific knowledge or between “qouliyyah” and “kauniyyah” knowledge. “Knowledge integration” model is believed to be helpful for scholars and researches of Indonesian Islamic studies to produce more relevant, objective, and acceptable explanation of Indonesian Islam. Knowledge integration can be “a unique and distinctive model of Indonesian Islamic studies,” said Surya Dharma Ali, Minister of Religious Affairs in his welcome speech to the conference.

It was recommended at the end of the conference that developing “Knowledge Integration” model needs to be taken as a collective agenda for scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies. The scholars and their institutions, including STAINs (State Islamic Colleges), IAINs (State Islamic Institutes), and UINs (State Islamic Universities) need to pay special attention on the idea of “Knowledge Integration” model, so that developing the idea become their collective, systematic, and continuous agenda. To support this agenda, a collective road map and action plan needs to be developed to formulate, disseminate, and implement “Knowledge Integration” model among Muslim students, scholars of Islamic studies, and Islamic education institutions. More importantly, authorities of Islamic higher education institutions need to develop strategic plan or policies that suit the needs for the development of “Knowledge Integration” model in all aspects academic programs, including teaching and learnings; researches, and social services.

A paradigm, in Thomas Kuhn’s view, “is not simply the current theory, but the entire worldview in which it exists, and all of the implications which come with it.” This view implies that developing or changing scientific paradigm is not an overnight job for every researchers, because it will take time for investigation, discussion, and dissemination. It is also not a
simple process, because it will involve and require social and political context and construction. The organizers 13th AICIS seems to be fully aware that identifying and developing a distinctive paradigm and pursuing knowledge integration in Indonesian Islamic studies is not an easy task. It requires long term commitment, intensive researches, and extensive discussions, considering many opinions, and involving scholars of various disciplines. For this reason, a long term planning and action plans will pave the way for the development of a unique paradigm for Indonesian Islamic studies that can produce open minded attitude and broad understanding of Islamic teachings. In a long term, Azyumardi believes, such a paradigm will develop and promote “moderate Islam (wasatiyyah Islam)” that can be a model for other Muslim countries. Above all, open mind and moderation will make Indonesia become the future center for Islamic civilization. “Indonesia,” Surya Dharma Ali, suggested in his opening remarks, “is qualified to be a center for the development of new Islamic civilization.”

Since my notes are generally based on participant observation and scan reading of some relevant papers, I am aware that my notes and my judgments may not fully be accurate. Therefore, criticisms and suggestions to these notes are invited and will be wholeheartedly appreciated. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all national and international speakers as well as participants of 13th AICIS who generously shared their ideas and experiences. May their ideas inspire scholars of Indonesian Islamic studies with new and distinctive paradigm.