

# Operationalising Islamic Value Principles in Malay Fiction: A Passage-Level Analysis of Abdullah Hussain's *Imam*

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.930000012>

Received: 10 December 2025; Accepted: 17 December 2025; Published: 24 December 2025

## ABSTRACT

This article analyses Abdullah Hussain's *Imam* (1995) using Najīb al-Kīlānī's Principle Two of Islamic literature—commitment to sound Islamic values—as an operational lens. This principle is operationalized into five textual marker-families: (i) tawhīd & teleology; (ii) insān as khalīfah/amanah; (iii) adab & wasatiyyah; (iv) shūrā & procedural justice; and (v) family ihsān. Through directed qualitative textual analysis with a prespecified codebook, 1–3-paragraph passages are purposively sampled in sermon, deliberation, domestic, and crisis scenes; Malay quotations are accompanied by concise translations and proverbial meanings are crosschecked with PRPM. Findings show that when markers co-occur (e.g., shūrā + adab in speaking; wasatiyyah + proverbial closure), normative stance becomes perceptible, credible, and memorable. Negative evidence—lush description without value-markers—clarifies the boundary: aesthetic “colour” alone seldom yields commitment. The study contributes a passage-scale operational framework for assessing the accuracy of Islamic worldview (tasawwur) in Malay-Islamic fiction, with implications for pedagogy (rubrics of adab in speaking & consultative deliberation) and da‘wah communication (ethos of satr al-‘ayb, procedural fairness).

**Keywords:** Islamic worldview; Najīb al-Kīlānī; *Imam*; adab; shūrā.

## INTRODUCTION

In the tradition of Islamic literature, literary works are understood not merely as entertainment, but as a field of commitment intertwined with narrative form and style. The classical-modern synthesis in Arab discourse demonstrates how Islamic vision, adab, justice, and balance are expressed through aesthetic strategies—choice of diction, sentence rhythm, ritual scenes, and the way characters argue (Badr, 1985; al-Kīlānī, 1987). Within his seven principles, al-Kīlānī emphasizes the Islamic Value Principle (Principle Two) as central: values are not just themes, but must be implemented through form—polite language, moderation (wasatiyyah), fair shūrā, leadership trust, and ihsān in family institutions (al-Kīlānī, 1987).

In the Malay world, the prominent “Islamic literature” movement since the 1970s showed a didactic tendency sensitive to aesthetics: authors used proverbs, sentence rhythm, and ritual atmospheres to frame readers' evaluations of moral and social issues (Ungku Maimunah, 1994). Malay proverbs function as sensory cognition—compressing cultural wisdom into images that are easily remembered and reused in decisionmaking; that is why they often appear at the end of scenes as an “attitude anchor” (Md Din & Awang Azman, 2020; Nopiah, Jalaluddin, & Kasdan, 2022; PRPM DBP, 2025). From the philosophy of art perspective, beauty is not an accessory; it is a way of knowing—leading readers to “feel” the truth before cognitively confirming it (Sartwell, 1999).

Attention to form influencing reception is also supported by developments in Qur'anic studies and contemporary religious discourse: digital hermeneutics shows that framing, rhythm, and paratext alter audience credibility and agreement (Lukman, 2018), while discussions on translation acceptability emphasize the choice of form—how language “looks, sounds, and moves”—as a factor of trust (Al Farisi, 2023). In the context of rituals, research

on time and popular practices explains how the repetition of form (cycles, space, gestures) trains emotions to align with norms (Mansouri, 2018).

In the tradition of Malay novels, Abdullah Hussain (National Laureate) positions his work at this intersection. The novel *Imam* (1995) is often referenced for showcasing sermon arenas, village deliberations, domestic routines, and crises as fields for the formation of social adab—where politeness of speech, reasoned arguments, and emotional moderation are demonstrated through scene arrangement, character movement, and proverbial closure (Abdullah Hussain, 1995). Within the framework of the Islamic Value Principle, these elements can be understood as the implementation of values through form: *shūrā* is not merely a theme, but manifests in turntaking and a just atmosphere; *wasatiyyah* is not a slogan, but a narrative rhythm that restrains *ghuluw*; family *iḥsān* is not a declaration, but household order and detailed service at a descriptive level (Ungku Maimunah, 1994; Md Din & Awang Azman, 2020; Nopiah et al., 2022).

## Problem Statement

Although Islamic literary discourse acknowledges that form (scene structure, sentence rhythm, proverbs, rituals) carries meaning, in the context of the Malay corpus there is still a lack of operational accounts demonstrating how narrative forms systematically implement Islamic Value Principles. Many previous studies stopped at thematic descriptions and lists of “values” without mapping form markers—such as adab in speaking, moderation (*wasatiyyah*), *shūrā* and procedural justice, leadership trust, and family *iḥsān*—at an observable passage scale (al-Kīlānī, 1987; Badr, 1985; Ungku Maimunah, 1994). This deficiency limits understanding of how values are presented as a process (e.g., turn-taking and reason-giving in deliberation) that builds reader confidence.

In addition, although Malay proverbs compress cultural wisdom into sensory images that guide evaluation (Md Din & Awang Azman, 2020; Nopiah, Jalaluddin, & Kasdan, 2022), their detailed relationship with Islamic Value Principles is rarely delineated—for instance, the role of “proverbial closure” as a decision binder. Developments in reception studies show that framing and rhythm influence credibility and willingness to agree (Lukman, 2018; Al Farisi, 2023), but their methodological bridge to Malay novel analysis is still limited. Consequently, reference texts such as *Imam* (1995)—which are rich in sermon arenas, village deliberations, household routines, and community crises—are often read from the perspective of what is said, not how Islamic Value Principles are implemented through form (Abdullah Hussain, 1995).

Therefore, it is necessary to formulate an operational framework based on Islamic Value Principles for the Malay corpus—with clear and replicable markers—so that the relationship between form and commitment can be empirically demonstrated at the passage level. Such an approach allows for the identification of recurring markers, the elucidation of their function in shaping normative attitudes (adab, moderation, procedural justice), and the assessment of the impact of marker clusters on reader credibility and normative memory—thereby enriching the understanding of values through form in Malay Islamic literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In Islamic literary discourse, the value–form combination is a fundamental premise: beauty is not an accessory, but a vehicle for argument. The classical-modern Arab synthesis (Badr, 1985; al-Kīlānī, 1987) formulates seven principles that demand unity of theme, ethics, and form. According to this framework, the Islamic Value Principle (Principle Two) emphasizes commitment to Islamic values as the core teleological and ethical framework encompassing adab, moderation (*wasatiyyah*), trust, justice, and *shūrā*—and must be implemented through form: polite language, a rhythm of speech that restrains *ghuluw*, fair deliberation procedures, and acts of *iḥsān* at the domestic level. This review also highlights a frequently reported gap: many studies stop at thematic analysis, whereas the operation of form at the passage scale (e.g., proverbial closure as a decision “binder”; turn-taking and reason-giving as evidence of *shūrā*) is still insufficiently formulated systematically in the Malay corpus.

In the Malay tradition, the “Islamic literature” movement since the 1970s showed a didactic approach sensitive to aesthetics—values are constructed as experiences through ritual scenes, characterization, and layered diction (Ungku Maimunah, 1994). Here, proverbs function as cultural cognitive shorthand: they compress sensory

wisdom (images, sounds, movements) that guides evaluation and facilitates normative memory (Md Din & Awang Azman, 2020; Nopiah, Jalaluddin, & Kasdan, 2022). Lexical references such as PRPM DBP help stabilize the meaning and contemporary usage of proverbs, thereby minimizing loose interpretations in textual analysis.

Developments in Qur'anic studies and contemporary Islamic discourse also support the form–reception relationship. Digital hermeneutics shows that framing, tempo, and paratext structure credibility and willingness to agree in modern audiences (Lukman, 2018). Discussions on translation acceptability emphasize that how language “looks, sounds, and moves” also determines trust (Al Farisi, 2023). In ritual ecology, repetitive forms—cycles of time, space, and gestures—discipline emotions to align with norms (Mansouri, 2018). All of this reinforces the idea that value commitment in literature operates through directed forms, not merely thematic statements.

For modern Malay novels, Imam (Abdullah Hussain, 1995) is often referenced as a key text because its narrative arenas—sermons, village deliberations, domestic routines, community crises—enable the study of form at a micro level. Scene arrangement, turn-taking, sentence rhythm, and proverbial closure often function as mechanisms that make *adab*, *wasatiyyah*, and *shūrā* perceptible, credible, and memorable. However, the review finds that a meticulous operationalization of how these forms implement Islamic Value Principles at the passage scale is still limited, thus requiring a framework that connects form markers → ethical function → reception effect.

Finally, from a Nusantara comparative perspective, linguistic findings on proverbs and speech styles provide a basis for testing the transferability of this framework to Indonesian or South Asian corpora. Questions such as whether “proverb–figurative pairs” (proverb–formula) in Indonesia function as discourse temperature regulators, or how the acoustics of sermon spaces and dialogue procedures in Urdu corpora influence perceptions of justice, remain open. This review, which synthesizes Islamic literary theory (al-Kīlānī; Badr), local criticism (Ungku Maimunah), proverb linguistics (Md Din & Awang Azman; Nopiah et al.), and form–reception studies (Lukman; Al Farisi; Mansouri), positions the Islamic Value Principle as a valid lens for reading Imam while contributing to a broader discussion on values through form in Malay Islamic literature.

### **Theoretical Framework: Principle Two (al-taṣawwur al-Islāmī al-ṣaḥīḥ)**

We operationalize Principle Two into five marker families: (1) Tawḥīd & Teleology (references to accountability/afterlife, intention of worship); (2) Insān-Khalīfah & Amanah (power as a trust/responsibility, not a trophy); (3) Adab & Wasatiyyah (politeness of speech, anti-ghuluw, *mīzān*); (4) Shūrā & Procedural Justice (turn-taking, reasons, fair atmosphere/clear acoustics); (5) Family Iḥsān (*birr al-wālidayn*, compassion, domestic order). Markers are coded when explicit linguistic/narrative evidence is present (dialogue/hadith/proverb/ritual).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses directed qualitative textual analysis to trace how Islamic Value Principles (al-Kilani's Principle Two) are implemented through narrative forms in Imam (DBP, 1995). The unit of analysis is a “passage window” of 1–3 paragraphs purposively selected across sermon, deliberation, domestic, and crisis scenes; transitional segments without clear value markers are excluded. The research instrument is a pre-specified codebook with operational definitions for five marker families: *adab* in speaking & ethical speech, moderation (*wasatiyyah*), *shūrā* & procedural justice, leadership trust, and family *iḥsān*. The meaning and usage of proverbs are cross-checked through PRPM DBP to avoid ambiguous interpretations.

Coding procedures are performed independently by two coders, followed by consensus discussion based on analytical memos; percentage agreement (and if appropriate, Krippendorff's  $\alpha$ ) is reported as an indicator of reliability, while an audit trail (page, decision, rationale) is maintained. Validity is strengthened through deviant-case probing: (i) ethically important scenes with sparse markers and (ii) lush descriptions without normative closure, to differentiate rhetorical “colour” from value “commitment.” Subsequent analysis maps the distribution of markers and clusters (e.g., *shūrā* + *adab*; *wasatiyyah* + proverbial closure) across scene types using a code × scene matrix, accompanied by annotated passages to show the form → commitment relationship. The study is based on published texts (no human subjects); all quotations are cited with page references and concise translations are marked as researcher's translation.

## ANALYSIS

### Tawhīd & Teleology (ukhuwah → social obligation)

Haji Mihad's acts of care towards Haji Daud (buying groceries, visiting) transform ukhuwah from a slogan into routine practice (p. 57). Rhetorically, the narrator maintains an understated reporting style—without excessive praise, without “heroic scenes”—which produces two effects: (i) despectacularization of goodness (goodness as routine, not drama), and (ii) habitualization of values (ukhuwah as a schedule, not a fleeting inspiration). From the perspective of Islamic Value Principles, this form makes commitment “visible” as repeated actions that carry the teleology of tawhīd (elevating human dignity for the sake of Allah), not merely ad hoc empathy. The mechanisms involved are: soft salience (attention drawn through simple, repeated actions), followed by embodied plausibility (values appear “reasonable” because they can be performed by anyone), and memory anchoring (easily remembered routines). Deviant-case: overly “colourful” but nonrepeated charity scenes usually do not generate lasting social impetus—providing a demarcation between “colour” and “commitment.”

### Adab & Wasatiyyah (patience as emotional discipline)

Haji Mustafa positions patience as a household trust/responsibility—“amanah from Allah”—not a personal mood (p. 71). Form strategy: narrative temporality is slowed (long period of wife's change), pausing/calm diction controls emotional temperature, and a reasoned advice structure replaces nagging. Mihad's advice to Qamar (“Allah prefers those who are patient,” p. 96) demonstrates adab in speaking—firm but based on evidence—which transforms individual defensiveness into community participation. Two important points: (i) patience is not passive; it is rate control over emotions, breaking the cycle of retaliation; (ii) patience functions best when surrounded by procedures (shūrā, reasons, turn-taking), because setting emotional rates without a fair discourse form can easily be interpreted as oppression. Mechanisms: stable sentence rhythm → sense of control; reasoned advice → “audible” justice; this combination reinforces moderation (wasatiyyah) as discipline, not rhetoric.

### Family Iḥsān (birr al-wālidayn as total practice)

Rubiah's action of stopping school to care for her mother 24 hours a day (feeding, bathing, pushing wheelchair; p. 73) showcases iḥsān as a daily ritual that dignifies the sick. In terms of form, the text uses close sensory details (tactile, visual) and work sequence to manifest ethics as repetitive work, not emotional outpouring. Simultaneously, the narrative criticizes the failure of extended family networks, serving as negative evidence: the absence of iḥsān is revealed through the asymmetric burden borne by one person. This domestic scene extends the Islamic Value Principle to the micro-sphere: cleanliness, orderliness, and service become moral metonymy—an orderly surface signifies an orderly interior. Mechanisms: sensory details move the reader from sympathy to procedural empathy (readers “feel” the burden of work), then generating a normative desire to support care as a family-community obligation.

### Shūrā & Procedural Justice (preserving dignity, satr al-‘ayb)

Mihad's refusal to expose Syamsuri's weaknesses despite bureaucratic pressure, and Ismail's restraint from bringing up personal issues (p. 145, 238), demonstrate public-private demarcation as procedural ethics. The forms that convey this ethic are: (i) turn-taking—characters speak without interruption; (ii) reasons are stated before decisions; (iii) an intermediary summarizes (the imam encapsulates pro-con arguments), and (iv) discourse acoustics—a “clear” sounding space depicts audible justice. Satr al-‘ayb here is not about covering up abuse of power, but choosing the correct channels for reform (iṣlāḥ), avoiding shame as a weapon in the public arena. From the perspective of Islamic Value Principles, shūrā is a form of value: justice is not only the content of the decision, but the way the decision is reached. Mechanisms: a clean dialogue framework produces embodied plausibility (readers “feel” justice as a spatial & turn-taking experience), while proverbial closure or the imam's summary functions as a memory compactant—making decisions easy to remember and adhere to. Deviant-case: the exposure of shame without procedure often escalates conflict without resolving problems—thus the novel restrains that strategy through the lines of adab.



Cross-subsection synthesis. Across all four domains—social ukhuwah, emotional discipline, domestic ihsān, and procedural shūrā—the novel maintains a form → value logic: small, repeated actions (5.1), language pace and reasoned advice (5.2), sequential care rituals (5.3), and neatly framed dialogue (5.4) are evidence of forms implementing Islamic Value Principles. Marker clusters (e.g., shūrā + adab in speaking; wasatiyyah + proverbial closure) consistently produce three levers of effect—salience (attention), embodied plausibility (sense of fairness/reasonableness), and memory compaction (proverbs/summaries)—that make value reception perceptible, credible, and memorable.

## DISCUSSION

From values to process. The findings clarify that Imam does not merely “declare” values; it implements them as observable processes at the level of form. Preserving dignity through *satr al-‘ayb* occurs within a framework of fair shūrā (turn-taking, reasons, reformulation), patience is presented as emotional rate discipline (stable sentence rhythm, softening of conflict temperature), ihsān appears as sequential work (sensory details of daily care), and wasatiyyah is realized through emotional rate control. This affirms the Islamic Value Principle thesis: valid values do not stand apart, but are woven into narrative forms (al-Kīlānī, 1987; Badr, 1985). Mechanistically, three levers of effect—salience (attention), embodied plausibility (sense of fairness/reasonableness), and memory compaction (proverbs/summaries)—explain how readers move from cognitive agreement to willing reception.

Boundaries and negative evidence. Deviant-case analysis shows operational limits: lush descriptions without procedural anchors (adab in speaking/shūrā) tend to produce felt “colour,” but do not bind commitment; the exposure of shame in public, though dramatic, escalates conflict without resolving problems, thus the novel restrains such strategies with an ethics of channels (investigation, advice, *iṣlāḥ*). This reinforces the difference between aesthetics as ornamentation (insufficient) and aesthetics as procedure (persuading).

Transferability and cultural specificity. The detected devices—adab in speaking, procedural shūrā, proverbial closure, rhythm that restrains ghuluw—are Malay local, but the framework is transferable. In the Indonesian corpus, for example, proverb–formula (PF) pairs potentially control discourse temperature similarly; in Persian/Urdu narratives, the “fair acoustics” of sermons or dialogues might correlate with willingness to yield.

However, transfer is not standardization: evidence of form must be sought in local cultural tools (parables, shūrā councils, spatial customs). Here, linguistic findings on proverbs (Md Din & Awang Azman, 2020; Nopiah et al., 2022) and reception studies (Lukman, 2018; Al Farisi, 2023) support the inference that the medium influences credibility.

Pedagogical implications. The codebook can be used as an adab teaching rubric: (1) students mark value markers at the passage level, (2) elucidate the form → value function, (3) compare proverbial closure with paraphrase alternatives (to test memorability), and (4) simulate procedural shūrā (turn-taking, reasons, reformulation). The result is form-based ethical literacy—reading not just “what is said,” but “how it is said” and why that form is fair.

Implications for da‘wah communication & public discourse. The practice of *satr al-‘ayb* and adab in speaking increases message acceptability; sermons or gatherings with clear acoustics and achieved discourse turn-taking radiate procedural fairness. Practically, the “four-R” criteria can be applied: Space (acoustics that do not overpower voices), Rhythm (calming speech/sentence pace), Rationality (reasons before decisions), Reiteration (fair summary + proverb/closing verse as social memory). Sermons framed with *rahmah*—as shown by religious figures in the text—shift the tone from “condemning” to inviting, aligning with reception studies findings that framing and pace build trust.

Conceptual contribution. This discussion shifts the discourse of Islamic literature from a “list of values” to a grammar of commitment forms. By formalizing the Islamic Value Principle at the passage scale (adab–wasatiyyah–shūrā–amanah–ihsān) and explaining the affective-procedural mechanisms that bind values (salience, plausibility, memory), this article provides a working language for replicably evaluating texts across works and languages.

Directions for expansion. Two reinforcements warrant consideration: (i) evidence of reception—short reading experiments (e.g., proverb recall, perception of justice) to test the effect of PF/rhythm on uptake; (ii) crosscorpus comparison—test marker clusters in Indonesian/Urdu novels and actual sermon transcripts to assess how far “aesthetics as procedure” remains effective beyond Imam. Thus, Imam is not only read as a text with Islamic themes, but as a manual of value procedures—a small model of how Muslim communities negotiate adab, moderation, and justice through ways of speaking, debating, and serving.

## LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Scope & generalizability. This study is based on a single text—Imam (DBP, 1995)—thus the findings cannot yet be generalized to the entire corpus of Malay Islamic literature. In addition, edition variations (layout/page details) and historical publication context can affect page anchors and stylistic emphasis. Future directions should build a multi-text corpus (Malay/Indonesian novels across decades and subgenres), including works considered “marginal” to test the robustness of the Islamic Value Principle codebook across writing styles, time, and audiences.

Issues of reliability & construct validity. Although the codebook was pre-specified and developed through consensus, coding reliability has not been formally measured. Subsequent research needs to report percent agreement and Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  for each marker family, in addition to testing construct validity (do the five marker families truly form distinct dimensions?) through exploratory/confirmatory factor analysis on a larger set of passages. To mitigate confirmation bias, we suggest blind coding (coders unaware of cluster hypotheses), preregistration of analytical questions, and third-party audited negative evidence assets.

Measurement of reception (reader response). Our interpretation of “unforced agreement” is still a textual inference; it needs to be grounded in reception data. Future directions: ablation experiments on passages (with/without proverbial closure; with/without shūrā turn-taking) and measure perceptions of procedural justice, willingness to accept decisions, and proverb recall using validated Likert scales; add reaction time/delayed recall to assess memory compaction. Eye-tracking or think-aloud techniques can track salience, while cross-over designs control for individual differences. Consider covariate variables such as baseline religiosity and exposure to proverbs to avoid confounding inferences.

Cultural specificity & framework transfer. The markers studied are closely tied to the Malay ecology (proverbs, deliberation procedures, domestic ethos). Therefore, transfer to Indonesian, Persian, or Urdu corpora needs to trace equivalent cultural tools (parables, speech formulas, local discourse adab) and not merely map one-to-one. We suggest a set of comparative studies: (i) a sub-corpus of Indonesian/Bruneian/Singaporean novels; (ii) transcripts of sermons and community meeting minutes; (iii) acoustic-spatial analytics (soundscape) to assess “audible justice.” Support with computational methods (sentence rhythm analysis, stylometry, proverb networks) to increase pattern detection accuracy.

Threats to inference & alternative mechanisms. It is possible that value reception is driven by the authority of religious figures or explicit didacticism, not form. Subsequent studies should differentiate the effect of form from the effect of status (e.g., compare advice passages from imams vs. non-imams with equivalent forms), and assess form-status interaction. Similarly, cultural familiarity with proverbs might—by itself—increase trust; thus, a measure of proverb familiarity needs to be included as a covariate.

Transparency, replication & data ethics. For replicability, provide an open repository (OSF/Zenodo) containing the codebook, sampling protocol, consensus logs, and annotated passage list (with copyright compliance: short quotations + page references). Implement pre-publication peer review of the codebook to stabilize operational definitions before application to a broader corpus.

Overall, the main limitations—a single text, unformalized reliability measures, lack of reception data—can be addressed through cross-text corpora, reliability/validity metrics, reader experiments, and cultural comparisons. This path will transform our framework from a case demonstration to a research program on how Islamic Value Principles are implemented as testable, measurable, and transferable procedural forms.

## CONCLUSION

Reading Imam through the Islamic Value Principle (Principle Two) reveals that Islamic tasawwur in this novel is not merely a declared theme, but a procedure implemented at the level of form: rahmah structuring mu'āmalah, patience as emotional rate discipline, shūrā as audible justice (turn-taking, reasons, space), amanah as taklīf, and domestic ihsān manifested in small, repeated tasks. The analysis shows that the five marker families (adab in speaking, wasatiyyah, shūrā/procedure, amanah, ihsān) function most strongly when clustered; it is this combination that activates three levers of effect—salience (attracting attention), embodied plausibility (sense of fairness/reasonableness in space & gestures), and memory compaction (proverbs/summaries)—so that value reception emerges as unforced agreement.

The main contribution of this article is an operational framework at the passage scale that maps “form → ethical function → reception effect.” By normalizing negative evidence (lush descriptions without procedural anchors) and differentiating “colour” from “commitment,” this framework advances the discourse of Islamic literature from a list of values to a grammar of commitment forms—that is, concrete methods for tracing how values are implemented in language, scenes, and rhythm. From the perspective of Islamic thought and civilization, the findings affirm that forms that preserve dignity (satr al-‘ayb), control conflict temperature, and compress wisdom into proverbs serve as social technologies that nourish the community's moral imagination.

Practical implications arise in two fields. Pedagogy: the codebook can be used as a reading rubric—students mark markers, elucidate their function, compare proverbial closures, and simulate procedural shūrā—so that literary literacy becomes an exercise in adab and deliberation. Da‘wah communication & public discourse: the “four Rs” (clear Space, calming Rhythm, Rationality before decisions, Reiteration with memorable closures) offer procedures for organizing fair and convincing speeches/meetings.

Finally, Imam emerges not only as an “Islamic-themed” novel, but as a small manual of value procedures—an example of how Muslim communities negotiate adab, moderation, justice, and compassion through ways of speaking, debating, and serving. This framework is ready to be tested in other Nusantara corpora and nonfiction genres (sermons, community meeting minutes), paving the way for a research program that measures coding reliability and reader reception effects. With this, the value–form relationship in Nusantara Islamic literature can be assessed more thoroughly, replicably, and usefully for classrooms and societal practice.

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