

Classical Sufi Exegesis and Malay Qur'anic Interpretation: Textual Traces of Ishārī Motifs in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*

Tafsir Sufi Klasik dan Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Melayu: Jejak Tekstual Motif-Motif Ishārī dalam Tarjumān al-Mustafid

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Abstract

Tarjumān al-Mustafid, the earliest extant complete Malay Qur'anic commentary, has rarely been examined through direct comparison with classical Sufi exegesis. This article investigates how selected *ishārī* motifs—*nūr* (Q24:35), *tazkiyah* (Q91:9–10), and *qalb salim* (Q26:89), with *rahmah* and *mizān* as supplementary cases—are rendered in the Malay commentary. Using comparative textual analysis, it reads *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* alongside al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, al-Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, and Ibn 'Ajibah's *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*. The comparison identifies three recurrent textual mechanisms—lexical retention, selective omission, and ethical amplification—operating within broader processes of semantic compression, contextual adaptation, and pedagogical domestication. The findings do not establish direct borrowing or justify classifying *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* as a Sufi commentary in a strict generic sense. They indicate, however, that selected *ishārī* resonances remain discernible through semantic compression and ethical reformulation. The article therefore proposes “textual appropriation” as a limited analytical category for tracing how classical Sufi motifs were rearticulated within a concise Malay exegetical register while preserving pedagogical intelligibility.

Keywords: classical Sufi exegesis; *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*; Malay Qur'anic interpretation; textual appropriation; *ishārī* hermeneutics

Abstrak

Tarjumān al-Mustafid, tafsir Al-Qur'an lengkap berbahasa Melayu paling awal yang masih bertahan, jarang dikaji melalui perbandingan langsung dengan tafsir sufi klasik. Artikel ini menelaah bagaimana motif *ishārī* terpilih—*nūr* (Q24:35), *tazkiyah* (Q91:9–10), dan *qalb salim* (Q26:89), dengan *rahmah* dan *mizān* sebagai kasus pelengkap—dirumuskan dalam tafsir Melayu tersebut. Dengan analisis tekstual komparatif, penelitian ini menjajarkan *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* dengan *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* karya al-Sulamī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt* karya al-Qushayrī, dan *al-Baḥr al-Madīd* karya Ibn 'Ajibah. Perbandingan tersebut mengidentifikasi tiga mekanisme tekstual berulang—retensi leksikal, omisi selektif, dan amplifikasi etis—yang beroperasi dalam proses yang lebih luas berupa kompresi semantik, adaptasi kontekstual, dan domestikasi pedagogis. Temuan ini tidak membuktikan peminjaman langsung atau membenarkan penggolongan *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* sebagai tafsir sufi dalam pengertian genre yang ketat. Namun, resonansi *ishārī* tertentu tetap dapat dikenali melalui kompresi semantik dan reformulasi etis. Artikel ini menggunakan “apropriasi tekstual” sebagai kategori analitis terbatas untuk menelusuri reartikulasi motif sufi klasik dalam register tafsir Melayu yang ringkas dan pedagogis.



Kata kunci: tafsir sufi klasik; *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*; tafsir Al-Qur'an Melayu; apropriasi tekstual; hermeneutika *ishārī*

Introduction

The history of interpreting the Qur'an has never been a singular, unified phenomenon. Historically, exegetical traditions have integrated theology, law, language, and mysticism, resulting in a multiplicity of interpretive traditions.¹ Classical Sufi exegesis evolved through sophisticated intellectual trajectories, in which symbolic interpretation emerged not as an esoteric deviation, but as a disciplined hermeneutical mode deeply rooted in Qur'anic discourse and established Sunni interpretive parameters.² Contemporary scholarship no longer treats Sufi Qur'anic interpretation as merely peripheral or illicit.³ Seminal studies by Gerhard Böwering, Kristin Zahra Sands, and Annabel Keeler have elucidated how classical Sufi commentators meticulously crafted interpretive methods grounded in linguistic plausibility and ethical symbolism, thereby contributing fundamentally to the broader history of Qur'anic interpretation.⁴ Nevertheless, while the textual and hermeneutical formation of classical Sufi exegesis in the Middle East has received considerable scholarly scrutiny, its transmission into, and subsequent reformulation within, non-Arabic exegetical traditions remains comparatively underexplored.⁵

For the purpose of this study, *ishārī* exegesis is understood not as unrestricted allegorical reading, but as a disciplined allusive interpretation that remains bound to the Qur'an's apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*), Arabic linguistic plausibility, and Sunni legal-theological parameters.⁶ Classical discussions distinguish acceptable *ishārī*

1 Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 42–44; Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 25–67.

2 Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 12–35; Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'an Commentary of Rashid al-Din Maybudi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 89–112.

3 Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 99–124; Johanna Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2019), 33–37.

4 Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 138–156; Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 45–67; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 87–110; Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today*, 25–49.

5 Muanaas Sholihin, Eka Prasetiawati, and Muhammad Nur Amin, "The Epistemology of Nusantara Qur'anic Exegesis: A Study of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by Abdul Rauf al-Singkili," *Al Furqan: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran dan Tafsir* 8, no. 1 (2025): 120–122, <https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqon.v8i1.3539>.

6 On the classical distinction between acceptable and rejected allusive interpretation, see Badr al-Din al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1957), 2:164–70; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah li-l-Kitāb, 1974), 4:200–204;

interpretation (*maqbul*) from rejected interpretation (*mardud*): the former deepens the ethical-spiritual meaning of a verse without canceling its literal sense, while the latter imposes meanings that negate the text, contradict *sharī'ah*, or authorize antinomian claims. This distinction is crucial for reading al-Sinkilī, whose Sufi affiliation was inseparable from legal and theological discipline. Accordingly, this article treats the selected *ishārī* motifs in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* not as evidence of esoteric deviation, but as ethically oriented allusive traces that remain compatible with the commentary's exoteric and pedagogical structure.⁷

Among the earliest extant vernacular commentaries produced in Southeast Asia, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkilī holds a foundational status in the historiography of Malay Qur'anic interpretation.⁸ Composed within the intellectually vibrant milieu of seventeenth-century Aceh, the commentary reflects a period marked by scholarly mobility, manuscript circulation, and pedagogical exchanges that connected the Malay world with the Ḥaramayn and other major centers of Islamic learning.⁹ Rather than functioning as a merely literal translation, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* served as a vernacular exegetical medium through which Arabic Islamic scholarship was rendered into the Malay intellectual idiom while remaining anchored in established theological and hermeneutical conventions.¹⁰ Existing scholarship has therefore situated the work within the broader contexts of Islamization, manuscript culture, and the emergence of Malay *tafsīr*, emphasizing its importance for the intellectual history of Islam in Southeast Asia.¹¹ Given its authority, manuscript circulation, and engagement with several branches of classical Islamic learning, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* provides a significant corpus for examining

Kristin Zahra Sands, *Sufi Commentaries on the Qur'an in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 12–35.

- 7 For modern studies on Sunni Sufi hermeneutics and the ethical-disciplined character of *ishārī* interpretation, see Annabel Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics: The Qur'an Commentary of Rashid al-Dīn Maybūdī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 89–112; Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 138–156. On al-Sinkilī's scholarly networks and Shattariyyah background, see Azyumardi Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern 'Ulamā' in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 78–95; Oman Fathurahman, *Tarekat Syattariyah di Minangkabau* (Bandung: Mizan, 2008), 67–89.
- 8 For the historical validation of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* as the earliest complete vernacular Qur'anic commentary in Southeast Asia, see Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London: Hurst, 2001), 161–163.
- 9 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 78–95; Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 89–112.
- 10 Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 145–167.
- 11 Anthony H. Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World: In Search of a Profile," in *Towards a History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 257–287; Ervan Nurtawab, "The Tradition of Writing Qur'anic Commentaries in Java and Sunda," *Jurnal Subuf* 2, no. 2 (2009): 163–195, <https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v2i2.87>; Farid F. Saenong, "Vernacularization of the Qur'an: Tantangan dan Prospek Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Qur'an* 1, no. 3 (2006): 579.

how exegetical concepts were transmitted, translated, and reformulated across linguistic and cultural boundaries.¹² At the same time, al-Sinkili's intellectual profile should not be separated from his Sufi affiliation and his concern for legal-theological discipline: as a scholar associated with the Shattariyyah order, he represents a form of Sufi scholarship that sought to align spiritual practice with the normative framework of Islamic law. This point is crucial for the present study, because it situates the search for *ishārī* traces in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* within the boundaries of *maqbul* allusive interpretation rather than antinomian mysticism.¹³



Figure 1. *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* is attributed to Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Sinkili, a prominent scholar of the Malay-Indonesian world. Source: ‘Abd al-Ra’uf al-Sinkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* (Singapore: al-Haramayn, n.d.), cover.

Existing scholarship on Qur’anic interpretation in Southeast Asia may be delineated into four primary intellectual trajectories.¹⁴ The first cluster establishes the hermeneutical principles of classical Sufi exegesis, emphasizing symbolic cognition,

12 Zulfi Ida Syarifah, “Transformasi Filologis Teks Manuskrip dan Edisi Cetakan Tafsir *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* pada Surah Yusuf Ayat 1–2,” *Al-Tadabbur: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur’an dan Tafsir* 10, no. 1 (2025): 48–52, <https://doi.org/10.30868/at.v10i01.8312>.

13 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 78–95; Fathurahman, *Tarekat Syattariyyah di Minangkabau*, 67–89; Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 161–167.

14 Moh. Jamalul Lail, M. Riyan Hidayat, and Roma Wijaya, “Epistemology of Nusantara Exegesis in the 17th Century: A Study of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by Abdurrauf al-Singkili,” *QOF* 8, no. 2 (2024): 201–220, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v8i2.2491>.

spiritual epistemology, and the textual discipline inherent in *tafsir ishārī*.¹⁵ The second traces the history of Malay Qur'anic interpretation and its relationship to Arabic exegetical traditions.¹⁶ A third body of literature investigates the manuscript cultures, scholarly mobility, and intellectual networks that connected the Ḥaramayn with the Malay-Indonesian world, thereby illuminating the historical conditions of textual circulation.¹⁷ A fourth and growing body of scholarship focuses on *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* and assesses its place in the intellectual history of Islam in the region.¹⁸ Despite these substantial contributions, comparatively little attention has been devoted to direct textual comparison between specific passages in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* and the hermeneutical treatments offered by classical Sufi authorities.¹⁹ Consequently, the mechanisms through which particular *ishārī* motifs were textually appropriated, reformulated, or adapted within the Malay exegetical tradition remain an analytical lacuna.²⁰

Existing scholarship has substantially addressed the historical genealogy, manuscript transmission, and regional significance of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*; however, it has rarely investigated how specific *ishārī* motifs were textually appropriated through systematic comparison with classical Sufi commentaries.²¹ Recent scholarship on Akbarian Qur'anic hermeneutics in pre-modern Javanese literature underscores the necessity of analyzing concrete textual relationships rather

15 Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 12–35; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 92–122.

16 Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 145–167; Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition*, 25–67.

17 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 78–95; Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 89–112; Mauluddin et al., “Sufi Hermeneutics and Symbolic Tafsir,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 413–443, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6315>.

18 Moh. Jamalul Lail, M. Riyan Hidayat, and Roma Wijaya, “Epistemology of Nusantara Exegesis in the 17th Century: A Study of *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* by Abdurrauf al-Singkili,” *QOF* 8, no. 2 (2024): 201–220, <https://doi.org/10.30762/qof.v8i2.2491>; Ahmad Baidowi and Ma'rufah, “Localizing the Qur'an in Javanese Pesantren,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 302–326, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.5842>; Budi Rahman Hakim, “Resurgence of Sufi Islam in Indonesia,” *Jurnal Ilmu Ushuludin* 12, no. 1 (2025): 87–108, <https://doi.org/10.15408/iu.v12i1.46798>.

19 Sholihin, Prasetiawati, and Amin, “Epistemology of Nusantara Qur'anic Exegesis,” 120–122.

20 While the hermeneutical frameworks of classical Sufi exegesis are extensively analyzed by Sands (*Sufi Commentaries*, 45–67) and Keeler (*Sufi Hermeneutics*, 134–156), and the general historical development of regional exegesis is well-documented by scholars such as Nurtawab (“Tradition of Writing Qur'anic Commentaries,” 163–95) and Islah Gusmian (*Khazanah Tafsir di Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika hingga Ideologi* [Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013]), the specific textual intersection of these two domains—how classical *ishārī* motifs are appropriated into vernacular Malay texts—remains largely unaddressed.

21 For historical and manuscript studies, see Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World: Transmission and Responses* (London: Hurst, 2001), 145–167; and Lail, Hidayat, and Wijaya, “Epistemology of Nusantara Exegesis,” 201–220. These works do not undertake a line-by-line comparison of selected *ishārī* motifs with classical Sufi commentaries.

than relying on generalized assumptions of intellectual influence or regional affinity.²² Building upon this methodological insight, the present study pivots from broad historical narratives of transmission to the precise textual mechanisms through which selected Sufi hermeneutical motifs were reformulated within a specific Malay exegetical corpus. Rather than surveying the entirety of Malay or Nusantara Qur'anic traditions, this article investigates how specific *ishārī* motifs—namely *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, and *qalb salīm*—were appropriated in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* through a comparative reading of selected Qur'anic passages alongside classical Sufi exegesis.²³

This study addresses three related questions. *First*, how are selected *ishārī* motifs articulated within classical Sufi exegesis, particularly in the foundational commentaries of al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, and Ibn 'Ajībah? *Second*, how are these specific motifs textually appropriated and reformulated in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*? *Third*, what hermeneutical transformations become discernible when these motifs are translated into a Malay exegetical setting? Addressing these questions is significant not only for clarifying the textual relationship between classical Arabic Sufi commentaries and Malay Qur'anic interpretation, but also for refining methodological approaches within comparative *ishārī* studies.²⁴ Rather than treating the circulation of Islamic ideas as evidence of linear, direct influence, the present study approaches textual appropriation as an observable interpretive process grounded in the close comparison of specific Qur'anic passages and their exegetical renderings.²⁵ In doing so, this study situates Malay Qur'anic interpretation more explicitly within the wider history of Qur'anic interpretation, while also suggesting how selected Sufi exegetical motifs could be reformulated across linguistic and pedagogical contexts.²⁶

Methodologically, this study employs comparative textual analysis to examine selected Qur'anic passages in which ethical-symbolic motifs provide clear points of comparison between classical Sufi exegesis and Malay Qur'anic interpretation. The

22 Nur Ahmad, "Akbarian Qur'anic Hermeneutics in Pre-Modern Javanese Literature," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 77 (2025): 39–85. Ahmad's analysis provides a vital methodological precedent, demonstrating that the presence of *Sufi hermeneutics* in the archipelago must be verified through the close textual reading of local manuscripts rather than presumed through the mere historical existence of scholarly networks.

23 Lail, Hidayat, and Wijaya, "Epistemology of Nusantara Exegesis," 209–212.

24 Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition*, 42–44; Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 25–67. While these foundational works primarily map the Arabic exegetical canon, extending their comparative methodologies to vernacular Southeast Asian texts addresses a critical gap in the global historiography of *tafsīr*.

25 Lail, Hidayat, and Wijaya, "Epistemology of Nusantara Exegesis," 212–215.

26 Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islāhī's Concept of Naẓm* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986). Mir's concept of thematic coherence (*naẓm*) is relevant here insofar as it underscores the importance of patterned textual relationships rather than isolated lexical parallels.

primary comparative corpus consists of three classical Sufi commentaries—Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī’s *Ḥaqā’iq al-Tafsīr*, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī’s *Laṭā’if al-Ishārāt*, and Aḥmad Ibn ‘Ajībah’s *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*—read alongside ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkilī’s *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* as the principal Malay text. The analysis proceeds in three steps: first, identifying selected *ishārī* motifs in specific Qur’anic passages; second, examining their articulation in classical Sufi commentaries; and third, comparing their Malay renderings in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*. The comparison focuses on lexical retention, selective omission, and ethical amplification, operating within broader processes of semantic compression, contextual adaptation, and pedagogical domestication. Consequently, claims regarding textual appropriation are grounded in observable textual correspondences, lexical shifts, and exegetical reformulations rather than generalized assumptions of influence or doctrinal continuity.

To maintain philological and hermeneutical precision, this article narrows its analytical scope. It does not seek to essentialize the entirety of Malay Qur’anic interpretation, map the full diversity of Nusantara *tafsir*, or claim that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* derives exclusively from classical Sufi exegesis.²⁷ Instead, the discussion is strictly confined to selected Qur’anic passages where identifiable *ishārī* motifs permit systematic textual comparison between classical Arabic commentaries and their Malay counterpart. Within these rigorous boundaries, this article argues that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* preserves discernible textual appropriations of selected *ishārī* motifs through dynamic processes of interpretive mediation, selective reformulation, and pedagogical domestication. By combining close textual reading with explicit analytical delimitation, the study contributes to Qur’anic studies and Sufi studies by showing how selected *ishārī* motifs were translated, abbreviated, and reformulated within a specific Malay exegetical corpus.

Contextualizing *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*: Networks, Sources, and Corpus

The Malay Ishārī Tradition and the Vernacularization of Scripture

Tarjumān al-Mustafid by ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Sinkilī stands as the foundational extant Qur’anic commentary in the Malay language, marking a critical juncture in the history of regional exegesis.²⁸ Its significance transcends mere chronological priority; the work established a vernacular interpretive idiom that mediated Arabic

27 As demonstrated by Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 89–112, and Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 78–95, Islamic intellectual networks in the archipelago were highly dynamic and pluralistic. Consequently, proposing a singular, overarching “Nusantara” hermeneutic model is methodologically precarious; rigorous scholarship demands corpus-specific textual analysis rather than broad generalizations.

28 Sholihin, Prasetiawati, and Amin, “Epistemology of Nusantara Qur’anic Exegesis,” 121–123.

Islamic scholarship for Malay-speaking communities while remaining anchored in established hermeneutical conventions.²⁹ Rather than a simple translation, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* articulated a new form of exegetical discourse that was situated in the linguistic and theological context of seventeenth-century Aceh.³⁰

The work's authority is reflected in the numerous manuscript witnesses found across Aceh, the Malay Peninsula, and the wider archipelago. Their circulation indicates that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* functioned as a teaching text within networks of books, scholars, and institutions rather than as an isolated composition.³¹ Consequently, this study approaches *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* as an empirically grounded corpus, providing the textual basis necessary to examine how specific *ishārī* motifs were appropriated and rearticulated within a vernacular setting.³² This corpus is significant because it shows how Arabic exegetical traditions were articulated within the local context of Southeast Asia while maintaining both continuity and adaptation.³³

The Tarjumān Paradox: Exoteric Structure and Ishārī Traces

A central methodological difficulty in this study is what may be called the *Tarjumān* paradox. *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* is not a classical Sufi manual, nor does it present itself as a sustained *ishārī* commentary in the manner of al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* or al-Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*. It is more accurately understood as a vernacular Malay commentary whose dominant structure remains exoteric and pedagogical, drawing on mainstream *tafsīr* conventions associated with the wider Arabic exegetical tradition, including works such as al-Bayḍāwī. This point must be acknowledged at the outset: the purpose of this article is not to reclassify *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* as a Sufi *tafsīr* in the strict generic sense, but to examine whether limited *ishārī* resonances can be detected within its vernacular exegetical form.³⁴

29 Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis," 257–87; Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 161–87.

30 Eryan Nurtawab, "Qur'anic Translations in Malay, Javanese and Sundanese: A Commentary or Substitution?" in *The Qur'an in the Malay-Indonesian World: Context and Interpretation*, ed. Majid Daneshgar, Peter G. Riddell, and Andrew Rippin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 39–57.

31 Nurtawab, "Qur'anic Translations," 39–57; Farid F. Saenong, "Vernacularization of the Qur'an: Tantangan dan Prospek Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia," *Jurnal Studi Qur'an* 1, no. 3 (2006): 578–579.

32 Syarifah, "Transformasi Filologis," 52–55.

33 al-Sinkilī, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*; Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis," 260–265; Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 170–175.

34 Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 161–167; Anthony H. Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World: In Search of a Profile," in *Towards a History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 257–287; Nurtawab, "Qur'anic Translations," 39–57.

The relevance of *ishārī* analysis therefore lies in the possibility that selected Sufi hermeneutical orientations may appear within an otherwise exoteric corpus through translation choices, lexical compression, and ethical reformulation. In this respect, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is treated not as a Sufi commentary by genre, but as a Malay exegetical text in which certain allusive motifs may be traced at the level of semantic orientation. The question is not whether al-Sinkili openly transforms *Tarjumān* into a mystical commentary, nor whether he directly borrows from al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, or Ibn 'Ajjabah. Rather, the analysis asks whether selected Malay renderings—such as *menerangkan*, *menyucikan*, *ma'siyah*, and *hati yang sejahtera*—perform interpretive work compatible with recognized *ishārī* orientations while remaining embedded in a commentary whose dominant form is pedagogical and exoteric.³⁵

Arabic Exegetical Precedents and the Mobility of Sufi Hermeneutics

The emergence of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is inseparable from the intensified scholarly exchanges linking the Haramayn and the Malay archipelago during the seventeenth century.³⁶ The circulation of Sufi exegetical texts was facilitated not merely by the physical transport of manuscripts but through *ijāzah* networks, scholarly mobility, and pedagogical exchanges that facilitated the vernacular mediation of Arabic hermeneutical thought.³⁷ These conduits enabled classical exegetical traditions to move beyond their original linguistic centers, becoming available for reinterpretation within the Malay intellectual milieu.³⁸

Rather than assuming linear dependence between Arabic Sufi commentaries and *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, this study examines how selected *ishārī* motifs were reformulated within a Malay exegetical setting. The analysis emphasizes observable textual correspondences, reformulations, and omissions rather than unverified chains of direct borrowing. It focuses on the mechanisms of translation, compression, selective omission, and rearticulation through which classical Sufi motifs became intelligible within the concise pedagogical idiom of Malay Qur'anic interpretation.³⁹

35 For the comparative framework of classical Sufi exegesis used in this study, see al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*; al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*; Ibn 'Ajjabah, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*.

36 Sahlan Muhammad Faqih, Dadan Rusmana, and Yayan Rahtikawati, "Orientasi Tafsir *Tarjuman Al-Mustafid* Karya Abdur Rauf Al-Singkili," *AT-TURAS: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 9, no. 1 (2022): 20–24, <https://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v9i1.3205>.

37 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 31–87; Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 31–72.

38 Oman Fathurahman, *Filologi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia, 2015), 83–105; Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 145–167; Fathurahman, *Tarekat Syattariyah di Minangkabau*, 67–89.

39 Peter G. Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 41–78; Anthony H. Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World: In Search of a Profile," in *Towards a History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 257–287.

Establishing the Comparative Corpus

The decision to concentrate exclusively on *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is a deliberate analytical delimitation, necessitated by the requirement for rigorous textual precision. Any attempt to generalize across Malay or Nusantara Qur'anic interpretation would compromise the depth required for systematic textual comparison.⁴⁰ Instead, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* was selected based on four empirical criteria: its status as the earliest extant complete Malay commentary, the density of its manuscript tradition, its sustained engagement with the Arabic exegetical canon, and the availability of reliable editions.⁴¹

Later vernacular works, such as al-Nawawī al-Bantani's *Marāḥ Labīd* or Bisri Mustofa's *al-Ibrīz*, occupy distinct chronological, linguistic, and pedagogical strata.⁴² While these works represent vital milestones in the history of Southeast Asian *tafsir*, they address research questions distinct from the specific scope of this investigation—namely, the early cross-linguistic appropriation of classical *ishārī* motifs.⁴³ Accordingly, the following section juxtaposes selected Qur'anic passages from *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* against their counterparts in the classical Sufi corpus to isolate patterns of textual appropriation, selective reformulation, and hermeneutical rearticulation.

Textual Traces of Ishārī Motifs in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*

Reading Nūr (Q 24:35): The Semantic Compression of Divine Illumination

The Qur'anic motif of *nūrun 'alā nūr* ("light upon light") in Q 24:35 constitutes a primary site for articulating spiritual epistemology in classical *tafsir ishārī*. The verse presents divine light through a layered cosmological metaphor of a niche, lamp, glass, and oil. In Sufi exegetical discourse, this imagery becomes a textual field for articulating the heart's inward receptivity to divine guidance. The analytical objective here is not to search for a mirrored reproduction of Arabic symbolic systems within *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, but to investigate how the semantic function of *nūr* is rearticulated into the Malay exegetical register.

40 Peter G. Riddell, *'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkili's Tarjumān al-Mustafīd: A Critical Study of His Treatment of Juz' 16* (PhD diss., Australian National University, 1984); Islah Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsir di Indonesia: Dari Hermeneutika hingga Ideologi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2013), 59–82; Nurtawab, "Qur'anic Translations," 39–57.

41 al-Singkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, commentary on Q 24:35.

42 For a discussion on the evolving pedagogical contexts of later *ishārī* traditions, see Ahmad Baidowi, "Dinamika Karya Tafsir Al-Qur'an Pesantren Jawa," *Al-Itqan* 8, no. 2 (2022): 251–274.

43 The exclusion of later texts is a conscious methodological choice to ensure that the identified hermeneutical shifts are not confounded by the socio-political complexities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Figure 2. The rendering of Q 24:35 in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, showing al-Sinkili's Malay formulation of divine light through the phrase "Allah yang menerangkan segala langit dan bumi." Source: al-Sinkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, commentary on Q 24:35.

Al-Qushayrī provides a foundational comparative benchmark for this inward reading. In *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, he interprets the opening phrase *Allāhu nūru al-samāwāti wa-l-arḍ* by shifting the metaphor from the macrocosm to the microcosm: just as the heavens are adorned by celestial lights, the heart (*qalb*) is illuminated by the lights of intellect (*‘aql*), understanding (*fahm*), knowledge (*‘ilm*), certainty (*yaqīn*), and divine unity (*taḥwīd*).⁴⁴ Al-Sulamī's *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr* reinforces this internalization. By transmitting al-Wāsiṭī's interpretation, al-Sulamī renders *nūrun ‘alā nūr* as the convergence of the light of guidance (*hidāyah*) with the internal light of the spirit (*rūḥ*).⁴⁵ This esoteric trajectory peaks in Ibn ‘Ajjabah's *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*. Operating within a Shādhilī framework, he thickens the motif by linking divine light to complex ontological categories, delineating the illumination of the Divine Essence

44 al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 1:367–68. Al-Qushayrī systematically shifts the exegetical focus from external cosmology to internal psychology, establishing the heart as the ultimate locus for divine guidance.

45 al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 44–47. Al-Wāsiṭī's distinction between external illumination and the internal light of the spirit forms a crucial theoretical background for understanding how later vernacular texts conceptualize the mechanics of guidance.

(*dhāt*) from the Prophetic reality (*ḥaqīqah Muḥammadiyyah*).⁴⁶ From al-Sulamī to Ibn ‘Ajibah, the Arabic *ishārī* tradition consistently frames divine illumination as a multi-layered metaphysical receptivity rather than a mere visual metaphor. This technical exegetical vocabulary provides the comparative background for evaluating the Malay rendering.

The corresponding passage in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* exhibits a marked semantic compression. Rendering the opening formula of Q 24:35, al-Sinkili translates the verse into the Malay expression: “Allah yang menerangkan segala langit dan bumi.”⁴⁷ While this wording preserves the foundational relationship between divine light and illumination, it does not reproduce al-Qushayrī’s extended epistemic vocabulary of ‘*aql*, *fahm*, *yaqīn*, *ma‘rifah*, and *taḥḥīd*. The Malay rendering does not employ *kashf* (unveiling) as a technical Sufi term. The Malay term *menerangkan* is significant because it may convey both illumination and explanation. Through this precise lexical choice, the verse is rendered exegetically accessible to a Southeast Asian audience, stabilizing the theological meaning without importing the technical vocabulary of classical Arabic Sufi psychology.

Table 1. Lexical Comparison of *Nūr* in Q 24:35

Element	Arabic/ Classical Form	Malay Rendering in Tarjumān	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Qur’anic phrase	<i>Allāhu nūru al-samāwāti wa-l-ard</i>	“Allah yang menerangkan segala langit dan bumi”	God illuminates/ explains the heavens and the earth	<i>Nūr</i> is rendered through <i>menerangkan</i> , a Malay term that can signify both illumination and explanation.
Key motif	<i>nūr</i>	<i>menerangkan</i>	light/to illuminate/to explain	The rendering shifts from nominal symbolism to verbal instruction.

46 Ibn ‘Ajibah, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 4:190. Ibn ‘Ajibah deploys the terminology of *tajallī* (divine manifestation) to explain these light layers, representing a later technical formulation of the *ishārī* reading.

47 al-Sinkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, commentary on Q 24:35. The dual valence of the Malay word *menerangkan* may be read as linking the semantic field of illumination with the pedagogical function of explanation.

Element	Arabic/ Classical Form	Malay Rendering in Tarjumān	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Classical <i>ishārī</i> orientation	<i>‘aql, fahm, yaqīn, ma‘rifah, taḥḥīd</i>	not reproduced as technical vocabulary	inward cognition and divine guidance	The Malay text preserves the guidance- orientation without reproducing the full technical lexicon.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

This juxtaposition suggests a degree of semantic continuity operating through observable textual adaptation rather than linear dependence. Where al-Qushayrī expands *nūr* into a multi-layered theory of inward cognition, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* condenses the motif into a concise, functional formulation. This absence of complex terminology should not be misconstrued as the disappearance of the *ishārī* dimension. Rather, it may be read as vernacular compression, in which technical vocabulary is reduced while the association between divine light, guidance, and inward intelligibility remains visible. Accordingly, while this comparison does not establish direct genealogical borrowing from al-Qushayrī or al-Sulamī, it suggests that *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* preserves an inward-oriented trajectory of *nūr*. Through this Malay exegetical vocabulary, the commentary rearticulates selected *ishārī* resonances within a localized pedagogical register.

Reading Tazkiyah (Q 91:9–10): The Ethical Translation of Spiritual Purification

The Qur’anic injunction *qad aflaha man zakkāhā* (“successful indeed is the one who purifies it” [Q 91:9]) provides a useful point of comparison for examining the treatment of the *nafs* in Sufi hermeneutics. In *Sūrat al-Shams*, *tazkiyah* is not presented as a static moral virtue, but as the dynamic condition of *falāḥ* (spiritual success), set in binary opposition to *dassāhā* (*the act of corrupting or obscuring the soul*). While classical Sufi exegesis explores this purification through the lens of ontological refinement and the polishing of the heart’s mirror, the challenge lies in identifying how *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* navigates this transformation.



Figure 3. The rendering of Q91:9–10 in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, illustrating al-Sinkili's ethical translation of spiritual purification through the language of cleansing from sin and avoiding *ma'siyah*. Source: al-Sinkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, 607.

Table 2. Lexical Comparison of *Tazkiyah* in Q 91:9–10

Element	Arabic/ Qur'anic Form	Malay Rendering in Tarjumān	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Success	<i>qad aflaha</i>	"telah beroleh kemenangan"	has attained success/ victory	Spiritual success is rendered through an accessible ethical idiom.
Purification	<i>man zakkāhā</i>	"yang menyucikan dia daripada segala dosanya"	one who purifies it from all sins	<i>Tazkiyah</i> is expressed as cleansing from <i>dosa</i> .

Element	Arabic/ Qur'anic Form	Malay Rendering in Tarjumān	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Corruption	<i>wa-qad khāba man dassāhā</i>	“dan telah rugi yang membusukkan dia dengan ma‘ṣiyah”	and lost is the one who corrupts it through disobedience	The contrast between purification and corruption is framed through the ethical vocabulary of <i>ma‘ṣiyah</i> .
Classical <i>ishārī</i> orientation	<i>tazkiyat al-nafs, mujāhadah, purification of the heart</i>	no technical Sufi equivalent	inward discipline	The Malay text communicates inward reform through ethical vocabulary rather than technical Sufi psychology.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

This comparison shows that the Malay rendering does not merely translate *zakkāhā* at the lexical level. It expands the verse into an ethical field structured around *dosa* and *ma‘ṣiyah*. The result should be read cautiously: it may reflect a pedagogical tendency toward ethical clarity, but it may also reflect the available religious vocabulary of seventeenth-century Malay.

The question is whether al-Sinkili reduces this motif to rudimentary moral exhortation or sustains its inward, experiential orientation. Al-Sinkilī renders the passage as: “*telah beroleh kemenangan yang menyucikan dia daripada segala dosanya, dan telah rugi yang membusukkan dia dengan ma‘ṣiyah*.”⁴⁸ This translation indicates a shift from technical Sufi vocabulary toward an ethical Malay register, without severing the Qur’anic association between purification and inward reform. The Malay rendering foregrounds two semantic fields: purification as the removal of *dosa* (sin) and corruption through *ma‘ṣiyah* (disobedience). By anchoring this purification process in the concepts of sin and disobedience, al-Sinkilī shifts the motif from

48 al-Sinkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, commentary on Q91:9–10, 607. The Malay rendering reads “membusukkan dia dengan ma‘ṣiyah,” framing *dassāhā* within an ethical register of corruption through disobedience.

an abstract Sufi state to an embodied, ethical engagement. This need not be read as a transition into outward moralism; rather, it may be understood as vernacular adaptation in which the soul (*nafs*) remains the primary object of transformation, yet its success is framed through the practical language of penitence and behavioral rectification.

Classical Sufi ethical literature sharpens the hermeneutical inquiry by situating purification within a rigorous discipline of the self. Authors such as al-Ghazālī conceptualize *tazkiyat al-nafs* not as mere outward compliance, but as a transformative therapy; the treatment of destructive traits (*mublikāt*) is the essential prerequisite for cultivating the virtues necessary for spiritual knowledge.⁴⁹ Al-Qushayrī reinforces this orientation through the technical discipline of the lower self (*mujāhadah*), positing that purification requires a sustained struggle against blameworthy traits until the inner disposition is fundamentally re-formed.⁵⁰ This classical ethical-theological framework provides the necessary benchmark for evaluating the specific priorities of the Malay corpus, where the focus shifts from speculative metaphysics to the practical cultivation of the heart.

Against this background, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* engages with this tradition through a process of ethical amplification rather than reductive translation. Al-Sinkilī does not replicate the classical Arabic technical lexicon of *mujāhadah*, *kashf*, or *maʿrifah*. Instead, he compresses these complex internal states into accessible Malay categories: cleansing from sin, avoiding *maʿṣiyah* (disobedience), and attaining success through internal reform. This may be read as vernacular adaptation rather than doctrinal loss, although the linguistic constraints of seventeenth-century Malay should also be taken into account. By foregrounding moral discipline over metaphysical technicality, the Malay register makes the process of *tazkiyah* pedagogically intelligible for its seventeenth-century readership without compromising the Qurʾanic nexus between the condition of the self and ultimate spiritual success. In this instance, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* rearticulates a technical *ishārī* motif within the ethical-pedagogical register of Malay Qurʾanic interpretation, without requiring the specialized vocabulary of Arabic Sufi psychology.

Reading Qalb Salīm (Q 26:89): Symbolic Reformulation of the Sound Heart

The third passage, Q 26:89—*illā man atā Allāha bi-qalbin salīm* (“except one who comes to God with a sound heart”)—appears within Abraham’s eschatological prayer, establishing a decisive boundary between external worldly assets and the

49 al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, 3:45–50; Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 12–35.

50 al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-Ishārāt*, 3:714.

necessary condition of the inward self. In Sufi terminology, *qalb salim* refers to a heart purified from preoccupation with *ghayr* (other than God) and oriented toward divine love and obedience. The analytical focus here is to assess how *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* navigates this eschatological threshold: does al-Sinkilī translate *salim* as mere moral rectitude, or does he preserve the inward-spiritual register inherent in the *ishārī* tradition?



Figure 4. The rendering of Q 26:88–89 in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, where *qalb salim* is vernacularized as “hati yang sejahtera,” indicating a Malay ethical-spiritual reformulation of the sound heart. Source: al-Sinkilī, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, 380.

Table 3. Lexical Comparison of *Qalb Salim* in Q 26:89

Element	Arabic/ Qur'anic Form	Malay Rendering in <i>Tarjumān</i>	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Heart	<i>qalb</i>	<i>hati</i>	heart	Direct lexical correspondence; <i>hati</i> carries both affective and moral meaning in Malay.

Element	Arabic/ Qur'anic Form	Malay Rendering in <i>Tarjumān</i>	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Soundness	<i>salīm</i>	<i>sejahtera</i>	sound, whole, safe, peaceful	The Arabic sense of soundness is rendered through a Malay term of wholeness and well-being.
Full phrase	<i>illā man atā Allāha bi- qalbin salīm</i>	“melainkan yang datang kepada Allah dengan <i>hati</i> yang <i>sejahtera</i> ”	except one who comes to God with a sound/ peaceful heart	The eschatological condition of the heart is preserved in a vernacular ethical-spiritual register.
Classical <i>ishārī</i> orientation	heart free from <i>ghayr</i> , worldly dependence, and inner corruption	no <i>fanā'</i> or <i>baqā'</i> terminology	purified inward state	The Malay phrase preserves the inward orientation without technical metaphysical vocabulary.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The phrase *hati yang sejahtera* is therefore not evidence that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* becomes a technical Sufi commentary. It is better understood as a vernacular rendering in which the Qur'anic requirement of a sound heart remains legible through Malay ethical and devotional vocabulary.

Al-Sinkili renders the key phrase as “*hati yang sejahtera*.”⁵¹ This lexical choice is hermeneutically significant. While the Arabic *salīm* connotes soundness, health, and being unimpaired, the Malay *sejahtera* carries a deeper connotation of wholeness, peace, and security—a state of being undisturbed by external and internal anxieties. Al-Sinkili avoids imposing the technical Sufi vocabulary of *fanā'* (annihilation) or *baqā'* (subsistence) that might characterize more specialized commentaries. Instead, *hati yang sejahtera* functions as a vernacular bridge, transposing the eschatological gravity of *qalb salīm* into a spiritually resonant Malay register. This is not a reductive translation but a symbolic reformulation: the meaning of the “sound heart” is rendered

51 al-Sinkili, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, commentary on Q26:88–89, 380. The page contains the Arabic phrase *illā man atā Allāha bi-qalbin salīm* and the Malay gloss using *hati yang sejahtera*.

through a phrase that remains pedagogically accessible while retaining an inward ethical-spiritual orientation.

Classical Sufi exegesis treats the *qalb salīm* not merely as a moral designation, but as an ontological threshold. Al-Sulamī defines this state as a heart entirely vacated of preoccupation with *ghayr* (other-than-God), purified from the maladies of the world, and reoriented toward divine love.⁵² Al-Qushayrī similarly interprets *salīm* (sound) as a heart safeguarded from distraction, pride, and worldly dependence, positing the heart as the primary locus of spiritual cognition.⁵³ This demand for total inward purification is further intensified in Ibn 'Ajībah's later synthesis; he defines the *qalb salīm* as a heart entirely annihilated (*fanā*) from worldly attachments and subsisting solely in the continuous witnessing (*mushāhadah*) of the Divine Presence.⁵⁴ Within this classical framework, the heart is not an emotional center, but an instrument of recognition; it regains the capacity for true *ma'rifah* only when cleansed of the lower self's impurities.⁵⁵

In this case, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* may be read as performing a symbolic reformulation. Al-Sinkilī does not replicate the classical technical lexicon of *naḥs* or *mujāhadah*; rather, he compresses these complex internal states into accessible Malay categories. By translating *qalb salīm* into the Malay *hati yang sejahtera*, the Malay rendering marks a shift from technical Sufi psychology to a vernacular ethical register.⁵⁶ This is not a reductive translation but an act of vernacular adaptation: the heart remains the decisive site of accountability before God, yet the concept is repositioned within a Malay moral vocabulary that is pedagogically intelligible to its readership without compromising its inward orientation.

This juxtaposition suggests semantic continuity rather than linear dependence. The Malay rendering suggests that selected *ishārī* resonances may remain visible in translation through vernacular reformulation. While *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* avoids the metaphysical architecture of al-Qushayrī or al-Sulamī, it appears to retain the inward-oriented trajectory of the motif. This comparison highlights a specific exegetical process: the Malay rendering reformulates selected *ishārī* resonances within a localized pedagogical register.

52 al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, 78.

53 al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 3:24.

54 Ibn 'Ajībah, *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*, 3:248–49.

55 al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, 3:45–50; Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 12–35; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 96–107.

56 al-Sinkilī, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*, commentary on Q26:89, 380.



Figure 5. The rendering of Q21:107 in *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, preserving the Qur'anic motif of prophetic mercy through the Malay phrase “rahmat bagi segala alam.” Source: al-Sinkili, *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, 340.

Secondary Correspondences: Tracing Raḥmah and Mīzān

While the preceding analyses of *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, and *qalb salīm* provide the clearest textual evidence for hermeneutical adaptation, the motifs of *raḥmah* and *mīzān* offer secondary points of comparison. The aim is not to establish direct dependence on specific classical Sufi authors, but to examine whether *Tarjuman al-Mustafid* preserves comparable ethical-symbolic orientations within its Malay exegetical register. These secondary correspondences clarify how selected ethical-symbolic motifs are rendered through concise Malay exegetical vocabulary.

Table 4. Lexical Comparison of *Rahmah* in Q 21:107

Element	Arabic/ Qur'anic Form	Malay Rendering in Tarjumān	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Prophetic mission	<i>wa-mā arsalnāka</i>	“dan tiada Kami suruhkan dikau”	We did not send you	The prophetic sending is rendered in direct Malay syntax.
Mercy	<i>illā rahmatan</i>	“melainkan rahmat”	except as mercy	The Arabic <i>rahmah</i> is retained as Malay <i>rahmat</i> .
Universal scope	<i>li-l-‘ālamīn</i>	“bagi segala alam”	for all worlds	Universal mercy is preserved without technical prophetic metaphysics.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

The rendering of *rahmah* as *rahmat* shows lexical retention rather than doctrinal elaboration. Its relevance to the article is therefore supplementary: it indicates ethical-symbolic continuity, but not a strong case for technical *ishārī* appropriation.

The first secondary motif, *rahmah*, appears in Q 21:107: *wa-mā arsalnāka illā rahmatan li-l-‘ālamīn* (“We have not sent you except as a mercy to all the worlds”). In Sufi exegetical discourse, prophetic mercy is often treated not merely as affective compassion, but as a sign of divine guidance, without necessarily requiring a technical doctrine of prophetic metaphysics.⁵⁷ In *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, al-Sinkilī renders this verse with characteristic concision: “*dan tiada Kami suruhkan dikau melainkan rahmat bagi segala alam.*”⁵⁸ Here, the Arabic *rahmah* is expressed through the Malay *rahmat*, while the commentary avoids the elaborate technical language of prophetic metaphysics found in some classical Sufi commentaries. The Malay rendering foregrounds the Prophet’s mission as universal mercy. Compared with the layered speculative models of earlier commentators, this structurally compressed rendering

57 Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 67–72. Sands observes that classical Sufi exegesis frequently elevates prophetic mercy from a standard theological attribute to an active, epistemic medium for divine-human mediation.

58 al-Sinkilī, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, commentary on Q 21:107, 340.

associates mercy with guidance without developing a technical theory of prophetic mediation.

The second peripheral motif is *mīzān* (balance) in Q 55:7–9, wherein the Qur'an enjoins the establishment of equilibrium and warns against transgressive excess. In classical *ishārī* exegesis, this cosmological balance is routinely internalized. Rather than interpreting *mīzān* merely as a physical scale of justice, Sufi exegetes read it as the rigorous calibration of spiritual conduct—a dynamic and structured equilibrium between the exoteric (*zāhir*) and the esoteric (*bāṭin*).⁵⁹



Figure 6. The rendering of Q 55:7–9 in *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, where the Qur'anic motif of *mīzān* is expressed through the Malay vocabulary of balance, scale, and moral justice. Source: al-Sinkili, *Tarjuman al-Mustafid*, 541.

59 Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, 112–45. Böwering demonstrates that early *Sufi hermeneutics* positions this balance not as a simple opposition, but as a necessary correspondence between outward discipline and inward realization.

Table 5. Lexical Comparison of *Mīzān* in Q 55:7–9

Element	Arabic/ Qur'anic Form	Malay Rendering in Tarjumān	Literal Meaning	Analytical Note
Balance	<i>al-mīzān</i>	neraca/ timbangan	scale/ weighing instrument	The cosmological motif of balance is rendered through concrete Malay juridical-moral vocabulary.
Command	<i>allā taṭṭhaw fī al-mīzān</i>	prohibition of transgression in measure	do not exceed the balance	The verse is framed as moral regulation.
Justice	<i>aqīmū al-wazna bi-l-qist</i>	weighing with justice	establish weight justly	Ethical balance is emphasized over metaphysical speculation.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

This comparison supports only a secondary claim. The Malay rendering of *mīzān* does not provide strong evidence of technical Sufi exegesis, but it does show how a Qur'anic motif associated with balance can be expressed through concrete moral and juridical vocabulary.

In *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, al-Sinkilī grounds this ontological balance in the pragmatic Malay vocabulary of “*neraca*” and “*timbangan*” (scales or weighing instruments).⁶⁰ The commentary does not develop the abstract metaphysics of cosmic balance; instead, it speaks of *mīzān* as a moral command to act with moderation and to ensure the strict enforcement of justice and the prohibition of transgression. While the evidentiary link to classical *ishārī* mechanics is less overt here than in the motifs of *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, or *qalb salīm*, the underlying hermeneutical strategy remains consistent. By translating spiritual equilibrium into actionable socio-moral categories, this rendering suggests how vernacular exegesis can participate in the broader ethical-symbolic vocabulary of Sufism without relying on specialized terminology.

60 al-Sinkilī, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, commentary on Q 55:7–9, 541.

Textual Mechanisms: Lexical Retention, Compression, and Omission

The preceding comparisons suggest that *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* does not reproduce the technical vocabulary of classical Arabic Sufi commentaries. Across the readings of *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, *qalb salīm*, *rahmah*, and *mīzān*, the Malay rendering tends to preserve selected Qur'anic semantic orientations while reducing or omitting specialized mystical terminology. These patterns should not be treated as definitive proof of a deliberate hidden Sufi program. They are better understood as observable textual mechanisms through which selected ethical-symbolic motifs become intelligible within a concise Malay exegetical register. On this basis, the following discussion identifies three recurring textual mechanisms: lexical retention, selective omission, and ethical amplification.

The first mechanism is *lexical retention*. *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* consistently secures the core Qur'anic concept by anchoring it to a close Malay semantic equivalent—such as rendering *qalb* as *hati* and framing *nūr* through the dual-purpose vocabulary of *menerangkan* (illumination and guidance). This retention is significant because it keeps the vernacular terms connected to their ethical-symbolic Qur'anic associations. Within Sufi circles, the heart remains the center of inward accountability, and light still retains its association with divine guidance.

The second mechanism is *ethical amplification*. In translating concepts like *tazkiyah* (Q 91:9), the Malay rendering explicitly foregrounds purification from sin and the active avoidance of *ma'ṣiyah* (disobedience). While classical Sufi exegesis typically envelops the refinement of the *nafs* within the dense theoretical language of esoteric discipline and unveiling (*kashf*), *Tarjumān* distills the motif into a direct ethical imperative. This transition does not degrade the motif of purification into superficial moralism. Rather, it renders inward purification in a form that is pedagogically intelligible for a Southeast Asian readership.

The third mechanism is *selective omission*. In the passages examined here, specialized terms such as *kashf* (unveiling), *fānā'* (annihilation), and *baqā'* (subsistence) are largely absent from the Malay rendering. This absence should be interpreted cautiously. It may indicate a strategy of vernacular simplification, but it may also reflect the linguistic realities of seventeenth-century Malay, whose religious vocabulary had not necessarily developed stable equivalents for the full range of Arabic metaphysical terminology. The significance of this omission therefore lies not in proving authorial intention, but in showing how the commentary communicates selected inward orientations without relying on specialized Sufi nomenclature.⁶¹

61 Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 12–35; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 79–92. These studies show that classical Sufi

In this sense, omission functions as an observable textual feature rather than as conclusive evidence of a deliberate mystical program.

Finally, pedagogical domestication may be understood as the cumulative effect of these mechanisms. *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* renders selected *ishārī* resonances in forms suited to instruction rather than speculative elaboration. In this context, the *ishārī* dimension is articulated through a concise instructional register oriented toward comprehension and moral formation. The evidence therefore supports a limited claim: *Tarjumān* does not function as a technical Sufi commentary, but as a primarily exoteric and pedagogical Malay *tafsīr* in which certain Qur'anic motifs associated with Sufi hermeneutics are translated, compressed, and ethically reformulated.

From Textual Transmission to Hermeneutical Rearticulation ***Beyond Lexical Equivalence: Translating Symbolic Vocabulary***

The preceding comparative analysis reveals that the relationship between classical Sufi exegesis and *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* is characterized by dynamic hermeneutical rearticulation rather than passive textual reproduction. Al-Sinkilī does not merely map Arabic religious terminology onto Malay equivalents; he selectively preserves some interpretive functions these concepts perform within the classical exegetical framework. This suggests that translation in *Tarjumān* may be read as operating beyond lexical substitution: preserving the symbolic orientation of the Sufi source texts while recalibrating their linguistic and conceptual expression to align with the semantic conventions of Malay Qur'anic interpretation.⁶²

While classical Arabic commentaries often rely on dense metaphysical jargon, *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* expresses these concepts through concise Malay equivalents—*petunjuk* (guidance), *mengerti* (understanding), *ikhlas* (sincerity), and *hati yang bersih* (pure heart)—that prioritize pedagogical and ethical clarity. This divergence indicates that al-Sinkilī did not engage in a superficial substitution of vocabulary; instead, he translated the exegetical utility of these motifs. By anchoring classical symbols within a localized Malay register, the commentary allows selected *ishārī* orientations to remain intelligible within a vernacular register.

hermeneutics is not reducible to technical terminology, but also involves ethical and inward-oriented readings of Qur'anic imagery. In the present context, the absence of specialized terminology in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* is therefore treated as an observable textual feature rather than as definitive evidence of authorial intention.

62 Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 161–87; Johns, “Qur'anic Exegesis,” 257–87. These scholars emphasize that the transmission of Islamic texts in the Malay world was consistently characterized by a process of localization that prioritized the functional application of the Qur'an over rigid preservation of the Arabic idiom.

This mode of translation is best understood as interpretive mediation rather than mere lexical substitution. As observed by Riddell and Johns, the trajectory of Malay Qur'anic literature is defined by a consistent, indigenous reinterpretation of Arabic exegetical discourse rather than mechanical mimicry.⁶³ This aligns with Johanna Pink's broader conceptualization of vernacular exegesis as an active interpretive act; lexical selection is never neutral, as it inevitably recalibrates the presentation of inherited traditions to fit the semantic contours of a new linguistic setting.⁶⁴ The evidence from *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* supports reading the text within this framework. Al-Sinkilī does not preserve Arabic technical terminology as an end in itself; instead, he prioritizes the communicative efficacy of symbolic expressions, allowing selected *ishārī* orientations to remain intelligible within the Malay exegetical discourse.

Consequently, translation in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is best understood as hermeneutical mediation rather than lexical substitution. Al-Sinkilī preserves selected elements of the Arabic exegetical framework while adapting them to the pedagogical conventions of Malay Qur'anic interpretation. In this sense, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* functions as a vernacular medium through which selected Sufi hermeneutical motifs are reformulated within a Malay exegetical register.

Linguistic Constraint and Philological Caution

A philological account of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* must take into account the linguistic condition of seventeenth-century Malay religious prose. The absence of technical Sufi terms such as *kashf*, *fānā*, *baqā*, or *mushāhadah* should not be explained solely as a conscious theological or pedagogical choice. It may also reflect the uneven availability of stable Malay equivalents for specialized Arabic metaphysical vocabulary. For this reason, the argument advanced here remains deliberately limited: it does not seek to reconstruct al-Sinkilī's intention, but to identify observable textual patterns in the Malay rendering of selected Qur'anic motifs.⁶⁵

63 Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 168–82; Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World," 270–84.

64 Pink, *Muslim Qur'anic Interpretation Today*, 25–49. Pink posits that vernacular tafsir acts as a "site of negotiation," where translators must constantly balance the authority of the original Arabic text with the conceptual requirements of the target culture.

65 On Malay Qur'anic prose, vernacularization, and the philological conditions of Malay exegetical writing, see Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 145–167; Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World," 257–287; Nurtawab, "Qur'anic Translations," 39–57; Oman Fathurahman, *Filologi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Prenadamedia, 2015), 83–105.

This caution strengthens rather than weakens the analysis. If *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* does not reproduce the technical lexicon of classical Sufi commentaries, the relevant question is how it renders Qur'anic motifs that had acquired ethical-symbolic significance within *ishārī* exegesis. The comparison therefore focuses on textual correspondence, semantic shift, and lexical compression, rather than on direct influence or intentional concealment. Such an approach allows this article to recognize the exoteric structure of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* while still examining the limited *ishārī* resonances that appear within its Malay exegetical idiom.⁶⁶

Selective Reformulation as an Interpretive Strategy

The textual relationship between the classical Arabic commentaries and *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is defined by a dynamic of selective reformulation rather than passive borrowing. This process involves more than lexical transfer; it constitutes a form of interpretation. While specific symbolic elements remain recognizable across the corpus, others are abbreviated, omitted, or reorganized to accommodate the didactic requirements of Malay Qur'anic interpretation. Consequently, textual appropriation in this context may be understood as a process of hermeneutical adaptation in which selected elements of the classical *ishārī* heritage are rendered into an accessible Malay vernacular register.

The comparative corpus reveals three primary, recurring patterns in this reformulation. The first is lexical retention, through which foundational Qur'anic concepts—such as *nūr* and *qalb*—are preserved as the intellectual anchors of the Malay commentary. This retention ensures that the symbolic orientation of the source text remains intact even as its presentation shifts to suit a new readership. The second pattern is selective omission. Highly specialized Sufi terminology—such as *kashf*, *fanā'*, *baqā'*, and *ma'rifaḥ*—is consistently absent from the Malay passages. This absence does not necessarily signify a de-Sufization of the text; rather, it may be read as a reduction of technical metaphysical vocabulary. By limiting such terminology while retaining broader ethical-symbolic orientations, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* renders selected inward meanings intelligible within a Malay register.⁶⁷

66 On the technical vocabulary and ethical-symbolic orientation of classical Sufi exegesis, see Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 12–35, 141–168; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 79–112; Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*, 138–156.

67 Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 141–68; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 198–214; Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*, 138–56; Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 15–34. These scholars demonstrate that the “omission” of technical terminology is a common feature in the transmission of esoteric knowledge into vernacular settings, serving to filter out speculative complexity in favor of ethical clarity.

The third pattern is ethical amplification. The analyses of *qalb salim* demonstrate that symbolic *ishārī* readings are frequently articulated through specific ethical instructions. Rather than reproducing the elaborate metaphysical disquisitions characteristic of the Arabic tradition,⁶⁸ *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* reformulates these concepts into concise, actionable explanations that emphasize sincerity (*ikhhlās*), moral discipline, purification of intention, and upright conduct. This strategy should not be misconstrued as a reductive moralization of *Sufi hermeneutics*. Instead, it reflects a vernacular mechanism where inward metaphysical meanings are communicated through the ethical vocabulary prevalent in the Malay exegetical tradition, thereby bridging the gap between esoteric theory and moral practice.

Accordingly, the comparative evidence suggests that textual appropriation in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* functions via selective reformulation rather than direct textual reproduction. Continuity with the classical Sufi interpretive heritage remains discernible, yet it is expressed through a synthesis of lexical retention, selective omission, and ethical amplification. These mechanisms collectively facilitate the rearticulation of *ishārī* hermeneutics into a vernacular interpretive environment, transforming highly technical Sufi motifs into an accessible Malay exegetical register.

The Socio-Pedagogical Context of Exegetical Adaptation

The transformation of *ishārī* motifs in *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* is best understood not as a doctrinal modification, but as a form of textual recontextualization. The comparative evidence suggests that selected symbolic orientations associated with classical Sufi exegesis remain visible in the Malay rendering. These orientations are reformulated within a textual environment shaped by vernacular linguistic conventions, pedagogical needs, and the conditions of manuscript transmission.⁶⁹ The interpretive shifts observed in this study may therefore be read as forms of contextual alignment, in which selected inward-oriented motifs are rendered through a practical and instruction-oriented exegetical model.

The first dimension of this recontextualization is linguistic. Classical Arabic commentaries were composed within a milieu characterized by highly refined theological and mystical lexicons; concepts such as *kashf*, *fanā*, *baqā*, and *ma'rifah* presupposed a reader already socialized in specialized metaphysical discourse. In contrast, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* addresses a Malay-speaking readership through a

68 For the interplay between ethical instruction and inward spiritual discipline in classical commentaries, see Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 141–68; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 198–214.

69 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia*, 31–87. Azra emphasizes that the transmission of Islamic texts in the Malay world was mediated by specific institutional and manuscript conditions that favored instructional clarity.

vernacular register geared toward pedagogical clarity. The preference for accessible Malay religious vocabulary over specialized Sufi terminology may be read as a form of textual mediation. As evidenced in the readings of *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, and *qalb salīm*, selected inward-oriented meanings remain visible even when the conceptual language is streamlined. Consequently, the transition from an Arabic to a Malay textual environment does not necessarily entail the loss of symbolic interpretation; rather, it renders selected *ishārī* motifs communicable within a concise instructional register.⁷⁰

The second dimension of this recontextualization is pedagogical orientation. Throughout the comparative corpus, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* consistently privileges concise instruction over extended mystical elaboration. Whereas al-Qushayrī and al-Sulamī frequently weave multiple symbolic layers within a single verse, al-Sinkilī condenses these discussions into brief, functional statements centered on guidance, sincerity, and moral discipline. This structural preference aligns with the educational function of vernacular *tafsīr* within the Malay manuscript tradition, where Qur'anic interpretation functioned primarily as a medium for religious instruction rather than a vehicle for specialized speculative discourse. As evidenced by the scholarship of Azra, Laffan, and Gusmian, the circulation of manuscripts in the Malay world was inextricably linked to learning institutions that prioritized textual accessibility as a prerequisite for communal formation.⁷¹ Thus, the observed reformulations may be read as pedagogical adaptation to the requirements of vernacular instruction while retaining selected inward-oriented meanings.

The third dimension concerns the vernacular interpretive audience. The intended readers of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* differed significantly from the elite audience addressed by classical Arabic Sufi commentaries. Rather than presupposing familiarity with the dense conceptual vocabulary of the Islamic intellectual heritage, the Malay commentary articulates inward realities through expressions deeply embedded in local religious language. This strategy does not abandon symbolic interpretation; instead, it relocates it within an exegetical register appropriate to the manuscript's socio-cultural context. The evidence suggests that recontextualization functioned as a dual-purpose mechanism: it preserved interpretive continuity while simultaneously enhancing linguistic accessibility. Consequently, the modifications observed in *Tarjumān* do not necessarily reflect doctrinal discontinuity, but rather

70 For the interplay between pedagogical context and the simplification of metaphysical lexicons in cross-cultural transmission, see Riddell, *Islam and the Malay-Indonesian World*, 168–82; Johns, "Qur'anic Exegesis in the Malay World," 270–84.

71 Azra, *The Origins of Islamic Reformism*, 31–87; Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 31–72; Gusmian, *Khazanah Tafsīr Indonesia*, 59–82. These authors emphasize that accessibility was a critical factor in the stabilization of the Malay exegetical tradition, as manuscripts were designed for instructional utility within local madrasa networks.

indicate how inward-oriented Sufi themes were reformulated within a Malay exegetical register.

Continuity and Transformation: Reframing Vernacular Exegesis in Global Qur'anic Studies

The comparative findings presented in this study invite a fundamental reconsideration of how the relationship between Arabic and Malay exegetical traditions is conceptualized within contemporary *Qur'anic studies*. Historical discussions of textual transmission have frequently been bifurcated into rigid categories of influence, dependence, or originality. While these frameworks are useful for basic intellectual history, they remain insufficient for capturing the complex textual dynamics observed in *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*. This study argues that continuity and transformation are not antithetical processes but are, in fact, complementary and dialectical dimensions of exegetical transmission.

Continuity is visible in the persistence of selected *ishārī* motifs: the symbolic orientations of *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, and *qalb salīm* remain recognizable despite changes in linguistic expression and exegetical style. Transformation is equally apparent in the strategies of lexical retention, selective omission, ethical amplification, and pedagogical domestication. When *Tarjumān al-Mustafid* omits technical terms such as *kashf* or renders *nūr* through accessible Malay vocabulary such as *menerangkan*, the result should not be understood as a simple loss of meaning. Rather, this mechanism indicates a process of textual mediation in which selected Sufi hermeneutical motifs are retained at the level of semantic orientation while being reformulated according to the linguistic and pedagogical conventions of Malay Qur'anic interpretation. The evidence therefore indicates that continuity does not require literal textual duplication, just as transformation does not imply interpretive rupture. Both processes operate simultaneously within the historical transmission of Qur'anic exegesis across linguistic boundaries. This perspective shifts the discussion away from direct literary dependence toward textual continuity and hermeneutical transformation across linguistic traditions.⁷²

72 For broader discussions on the nature of exegetical transmission, see Rippin, *The Qur'an and Its Interpretative Tradition*, 1–18; Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition*, 15–34; Sands, *Sufi Commentaries*, 141–68; Keeler, *Sufi Hermeneutics*, 198–214. For the specific application of these frameworks to the Malay-Indonesian context, see Nur Ahmad et al., “Sufi Hermeneutics and Symbolic Tafsir in the Javanese Manuscript Hakikate Bismillah,” *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-ilmu al-Qur'an dan Hadis* 26, no. 2 (2025): 413–443.

Reframing Malay Tafsir within Qur'anic Studies and Sufi Studies

The implications of this study extend beyond the immediate analysis of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*, offering a comparative approach for the study of vernacular exegesis. *First*, it invites scholars to position Malay *tafsir* within global historiographies of Qur'anic interpretation, recognizing these texts not merely as regional curiosities but as active participants in transregional interpretive discourses. *Second*, this study proposes “textual appropriation” as an analytical category—one that allows researchers to trace textual continuities without being constrained by the reductive binary of “dependence vs. originality.” *Third*, it nuances the field of Sufi studies by repositioning *ishārī* exegesis primarily as a rigorous textual hermeneutical practice, rather than exclusively a reservoir of abstract mystical doctrine or speculative theology.

Ultimately, this article underscores the importance of manuscript-based comparison in reconstructing the intellectual history of Islam in Southeast Asia. The evidence presented suggests that the vernacularization of Arabic exegetical traditions was not a passive process of reproduction, but a process of translation, selective reformulation, and contextual adaptation.⁷³ When viewed through this lens, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* emerges neither as a derivative mimicry of classical models nor as an entirely autonomous creation. Instead, it may be read as a vernacular exegetical corpus that reformulates selected classical Sufi motifs within a distinct Malay register.

Conclusion

Previous scholarship has significantly advanced our understanding of the manuscript transmission and scholarly networks characterizing the Malay world's engagement with broader Islamic intellectual traditions. Nevertheless, these historical frameworks have often left a gap in understanding how specific hermeneutical motifs were textually negotiated. Rather than revisiting questions of abstract influence or historical lineage, this study has addressed this gap by identifying the specific textual mechanisms through which classical Sufi concepts were translated, reformulated, and recontextualized within *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*. By adopting a methodology grounded in close comparative reading—juxtaposing *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* against *Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, and *al-Baḥr al-Madīd*—this article has examined textual appropriation as a set of observable reformulations within a Malay vernacular exegetical corpus.

73 Baidowi and Ma'rufah, “Localizing the Qur'an,” 310–318; Taufiq and Said, “Qur'anic Interpretation among Sasak Muslims,” 395–405, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.v26i2.6287>; Mauluddin et al., “Sufi Hermeneutics and Symbolic Tafsir,” 425–435. These scholars collectively argue that vernacular exegetical texts serve as crucial sites of negotiation where transregional authority is adapted to local pedagogical exigencies.

The comparative evidence yields three primary conclusions. First, classical Sufi exegesis is revealed not as an arbitrary mode of esoteric interpretation, but as a disciplined textual tradition. Second, the symbolic orientation of motifs such as *nūr*, *tazkiyah*, and *qalb salīm* remains identifiable within the Malay commentary, suggesting a degree of symbolic continuity despite significant linguistic shifts. Third, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* does not reproduce Arabic Sufi commentaries mechanically; rather, selected Malay renderings preserve comparable ethical-symbolic orientations through lexical retention, selective omission, ethical amplification, and pedagogical compression. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that textual continuity and interpretive transformation are not binary states, but dialectical processes that coexist within the transmission of Qur'anic exegesis across linguistic and intellectual boundaries.

Methodologically, this study contributes to the field by proposing “textual appropriation” as an analytical framework for examining exegetical traditions without relying on the restrictive binary of dependence versus originality. Within the history of *tafsīr*, it positions *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* as a Malay exegetical corpus that can be examined in relation to classical Arabic models. By positioning *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* within broader discussions of global Qur'anic hermeneutics, this research expands the geographical scope of comparative studies while illustrating the significance of Malay-language materials for understanding the historical mobility of Sufi interpretive traditions.

While this investigation is confined to specific motifs and a single exegetical corpus, it offers a limited but focused basis for future comparative inquiries. Future research may extend this framework by examining the transmission of motifs in subsequent vernacular commentaries such as *Marāḥ Labīd* or *al-Ibrīz*, as well as diverse manuscript traditions across Southeast Asia. Ultimately, rather than providing an exhaustive account of Malay interpretation, this study suggests that close comparative textual reading can clarify the strategies of selective reformulation, textual mediation, and interpretive persistence within the transmission of Qur'anic exegesis across linguistic contexts. This conclusion remains deliberately limited: the evidence does not justify classifying *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* as a Sufi *tafsīr* by genre, but it does support reading the text as an exoteric Malay commentary in which selected *ishārī* resonances are textually discernible.

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Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the conceptualization, source collection, textual analysis, drafting, and revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version.

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