

Evaluation of Selected Fabricated Hadiths in Malaysia-Indonesia Through the Art of *Matn* Criticism

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the prevalence of fabricated hadiths in Malaysia and Indonesia through the framework of *matn* (textual) criticism. The central issue addressed is the widespread circulation of false hadiths and the need for systematic methods to identify them. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study employs document analysis to examine selected hadiths commonly propagated in both regions. The analysis identifies five key indicators of fabrication: contradiction with authentic scriptural sources, inconsistency with historical facts, deviation from Shari'ah principles, irrational content, and exaggerated rewards for minor acts. The findings reinforce the significance of *matn* criticism as a tool for hadith authentication. It is recommended that rational judgment (*Aql*) be integrated as a complementary evaluative criterion and that public awareness be strengthened to curb the spread of false religious narratives.

Keywords - Hadith; Fabricated; Malaysia- Indonesia; Criticism; *Matn*.

INTRODUCTION

One of the distinctive features of Islam is the divine preservation of its two primary sources the Qur'an and the Sunnah until the end of time. Allah SWT declares in the Qur'an: "*Indeed, it is We who sent down the 'Reminder' (al-dhikr), and indeed, We will be its guardian*" (Surah al-Hijr 15:9). According to Ibn Hazm (d. 456 AH), the term *al-dhikr* refers to that which was revealed by Allah SWT to His Prophet, encompassing both the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Ibn Hazm, 2009). In agreement with this, Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751 AH) further explains that the Prophet's words concerning the religion in its entirety constitute divine revelation. Thus, every revelation is from Allah SWT, making it part of *al-dhikr* which He has promised to preserve (Ibn al-Qayyim, 2020). Based on this understanding, the *ḥadīth* is included in the divine guarantee of protection against alteration or distortion. By the wisdom of Allah SWT, this preservation has been ensured through the emergence of generations of scholars devoted to defending the authenticity and sanctity of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings and traditions.

The science of *ḥadīth* criticism began during the era of the Prophet's Companions. However, the critical discourse at that time was not driven by skepticism of the Prophet's words, but rather by a commitment to verifying information (Umar, 2021). After the Prophet's passing, the Companions applied several methods of *ḥadīth* verification, such as requesting witnesses from narrators and requiring oaths. Cross-referencing with the

Qur'an and other ḥadīths was also employed when inconsistencies were identified. Over time, these methods evolved and reached their golden era in the third and fourth centuries of the Hijri calendar (Umar, 2021).

Within the field of ḥadīth criticism, the evaluation of the chain of narration (*isnād*) has received more emphasis than the textual content (*matn*). Scholarly attention in the literature of *'Ulam al-ḥadīth* has predominantly focused on *isnād* evaluation, often at the expense of *matn* analysis. As al-Idlibī (2013) points out, although *matn* criticism began as early as the era of the Companions, discussions on the methodological foundations of *matn* criticism are seldom found in the classical scholarly works, particularly during the formative period of Islam.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, focusing primarily on documentary analysis. Data were collected through document review to explore theoretical perspectives and evaluate fabricated ḥadīths circulating in contemporary Malaysian and Indonesian societies. Theoretical data were sourced from classical works such as *al-Mawḍū'āt*, *al-Muwāfaqāt*, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, and *al-Manār al-Munīf*, among others. Meanwhile, examples of fabricated ḥadīths from the Malaysia-Indonesia context were gathered from social media platforms, including Facebook and YouTube.

All collected data were analyzed using content analysis to identify the elements employed in the evaluation of fabricated ḥadīths based on the discipline of *matn* criticism. This approach allows for a systematic investigation into how fabricated traditions are assessed using principles rooted in classical ḥadīth scholarship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of *Matn* Criticism in Ḥadīth Studies

Ibn Ḥajar (d. 852 AH) (2013) defines *matn* as the content that follows the chain of transmission (*isnād*). Similarly, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) (2011) explains that *matn* refers to the textual part of a ḥadīth that comes after the *isnād*. The term *criticism* (*al-naqd*) in ḥadīth studies refers to a discipline that differentiates between authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and weak (*ḍa'īf*) ḥadīths, identifying their flaws and evaluating narrators using specific terminology (al-'Umari, n.d.). Accordingly, *naqd al-matn* (textual criticism) can be broadly defined as the analysis of a ḥadīth's meaning to assess its authenticity and identify potential errors within it ('Abd al-Majid, 2014). Based on this definition, scholars evaluate *matn* by focusing on two key aspects: (1) its consistency or contradiction (*muwāfaqah* or *mukhālafah*) with other ḥadīths, and (2) its alignment or conflict with the primary texts of Islamic law (Muḥammad Ayyūb, n.d.).

Ḥadīth scholars have shown serious concern for *matn* criticism in determining the acceptance or rejection of a narration. This directly challenges the claims of some Orientalist scholars who argue that early Muslim scholars focused solely on the *isnād* and neglected the *matn*. One of the most vocal among them was Goldziher, who claimed that early ḥadīth scrutiny lacked scientific methodology due to its reliance on *isnād*-based evaluation over *matn* criticism (Goldziher, 1971). Such assertions are unfounded, as the discourse of ḥadīth criticism encompasses both *isnād* and *matn* simultaneously. This is evident from the definitions provided by classical scholars. For instance, Ibn Jamā'ah (d. 733 AH) defined *'ilm al-ḥadīth al-riwāyah* as the science concerned with understanding both the *isnād* and *matn* (al-Suyūṭī, 2011). Likewise, Ibn Ḥajar defined it as the knowledge of methodologies and conditions related to both the *isnād* and *matn* (al-Suyūṭī, 2011). These definitions clearly demonstrate that *matn* analysis is integral to ḥadīth studies. Furthermore, the science of ḥadīth incorporates critical concepts like *shādh*, *munkar*, *mu'allal*, *muḍṭarib*, *mudraj*, and *maqlūb* each representing forms of *matn* defects (Engku, 2020). In line with this, Mus'ab (2021) emphasizes that the methodologies established by ḥadīth scholars for *matn* evaluation are not arbitrary but represent a coherent and structured system.

The discourse of *matn* criticism, in fact, predates that of *isnād* criticism ('Abd al-Majid, 2014). Muḥammad Ayyūb (n.d.) notes that such discussions began during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. At that time, any ambiguity or concern regarding a narration's content could be immediately clarified by the Prophet himself.

One such incident is recorded in the following ḥadīth: *‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb RA reported, “I heard Hishām reciting Surah al-Furqān in a manner different from how I had learned it. Since the Prophet had taught me this surah, I almost confronted him but decided to wait. I then took him to the Prophet and said: “O Messenger of Allah, I heard him reciting Surah al-Furqān in a way different from what you taught me.” The Prophet replied, ‘Let him go. He recited it in a way that was revealed.’ Then he asked me to recite, and after i did, he said, “That too was revealed in that manner. Verily, the Qur’an was revealed in seven dialects, so recite whatever is easiest for you.”* (al-Bukhārī & Muslim).

After the Prophet’s passing, the practice of *matn* criticism continued actively among his Companions. Among them, ‘Ā’ishah RA was especially prominent. Al-Zarkashī compiled her critical remarks in his work *al-Ijābah li Irād Mā Istadrakathu ‘Ā’ishah ‘ala al-Ṣaḥābah*. One such example involves the narration: “A woman, a donkey, and a dog interrupt the prayer” (Muslim, 1992). Upon hearing this, ‘Ā’ishah RA responded critically: “Have you likened women to donkeys and dogs? I saw the Prophet praying while I was lying down in front of him...” (Muslim, 1992; al-Zarkashī, 1970). Her criticism was based on two key factors: the grouping of women with animals and the contradiction between the narration’s content and the Prophet’s practice (al-Idlibī, 2013; Husen, 2013). Other Companions such as ‘Umar RA, ‘Alī RA, Ibn ‘Abbās RA, and Ibn Mas‘ūd RA also engaged in *matn* criticism (al-Idlibī, 2013).

As the tradition continued, *matn* criticism expanded during the period of the Tābi‘ūn and their successors (*Aṭbā’ al-Tābi‘īn*). According to Ali Yasmanto and Siti Rohmaturrosyidah (2019), this later generation developed a more refined model of *matn* criticism. They note that the emergence of scholars such as Shu‘bah Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160 AH), al-Thawrī (d. 161 AH), Mālik Ibn Anas (d. 179 AH), and others signified a shift toward specialized expertise in ḥadīth evaluation. Mālik, for instance, rejected a ḥadīth prohibiting the consumption of birds with talons, citing the Qur’anic verse: “Say, ‘I do not find within that which was revealed to me [anything] forbidden to one who would eat it unless it be a dead animal or blood spilled out or the flesh of swine...’” (Surah al-An‘ām 6:145) (‘Abd al-Majid, 2014).

The emergence of these scholars also responded to the growing threat of fabricated ḥadīths during this period. As ‘Abd al-Majid (2014) notes, fabricated narrations were being disseminated by groups hostile to Islam, such as the *Rāfiḍah* and *Zindīq*. Consequently, scholars of the time developed more robust methods to protect the Prophet’s traditions. This intellectual effort also gave rise to works specifically dedicated to this discipline, such as *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth* by al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204 AH), *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* by Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH), and others.

The Methodology Of Hadith Text Criticism

Some Western scholars, such as Goldziher (1971), have asserted that the methodology employed by Hadith scholars is solely focused on the evaluation of the chain of transmission (*isnād*). Others, like Schacht (1959), have argued that even though Hadith scholars address the *isnād*, their critique is methodologically weak. These assumptions, however, stem from a lack of comprehensive understanding of the Hadith criticism methods employed by Muslim scholars. In response, several contemporary Muslim scholars such as al-A‘zami and al-Jawwabi have refuted these claims and demonstrated that the methodology developed by classical Hadith scholars is not only robust but also irreplaceable by Western approaches like the “*common link*” theory or the “*isnād-cum-matn*” method (Masrukhin Muhsin, 2017).

Based on the discourse of contemporary Hadith scholars, two foundational principles have been identified as central to the practice of *matn* (textual) criticism. First is *al-muqaranah* or *al-mu‘āraḍah* (comparative analysis between different narrations), and second is evaluation based on rational scrutiny (*mīzān al-‘aql*) (al-Jawwabi, 1991; al-Silafi, 1999). According to al-Jawwabi (1991), al-A‘zami summarized that Hadith scholars assess Hadith texts using two primary tools: comparative analysis and reason-based evaluation. Al-A‘zami further notes that scholars would sometimes compare multiple narrations or evaluate them against the Qur’an, and on other occasions, use rational judgment to determine the authenticity of a narration (al-Jawwabi, 1991). Supporting this view, al-Silafi (1999) emphasizes the critical role of *al-mu‘āraḍah* in Hadith textual criticism, wherein critics compare a narration with others, evaluate it in light of the Qur’an and well-established Hadith (*mutawātir*), and, when appropriate, apply rational analysis.

Al-Silafi (1999) further observes that the practice of comparative analysis (*al-mu'āraḍah*) dates back to the time of the Companions, including prominent figures such as Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and Abu Hurayrah. This method was later refined and continued by the generation of the *tābi'īn* and their successors, including al-Zuhrī and Shu'bah. Similarly, the rational approach in Hadith criticism especially in evaluating the *matn* has also played a pivotal role. Al-A'zami (1990) maintains that textual criticism of Hadith is not possible without applying sound reasoning. This principle, in fact, had already been acknowledged by earlier scholars. For instance, al-Shātibī (d. 590 AH) stated, "*Revealed texts will never contradict sound reason*" (al-Shatibi, 1997). Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH) similarly remarked, "*If you find a narration that conflicts with sound reason, contradicts the clear revealed texts, or opposes established legal principles (uṣūl), know that it is fabricated*" (al-Suyuti, n.d.). Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) also affirmed: "*Sound reason will never contradict authentic revelation*" (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995). While these statements confirm the role of reason in evaluating the *matn*, it is important to note that reason must be guided, particularly in matters that transcend human comprehension (al-A'zami, 1990).

In the context of Hadith textual criticism, Ibn Qayyim (d. 751 AH) stands out as a scholar who systematized criteria for identifying fabricated Hadith based on their *matn*. According to Nur Muhammad Anas and Mohd Arif (2024), Ibn Qayyim outlined four key criteria for *matn* criticism: (1) the use of extreme or exaggerated analogies, (2) contradiction with sound reason, (3) the presence of fixed and improbable dates, and (4) the inclusion of peculiar or nonsensical prescriptions, especially in the realm of medicine. Nur Muhammad Anas and Mohd Arif (2024) further affirm that these criteria remain highly relevant today as preliminary tools to identify spurious narrations. Similarly, Mulla 'Ali al-Qārī (d. 1014 AH) highlighted three core elements in Hadith text criticism: (1) contradiction with the Qur'an, (2) contradiction with authentic Hadith, and (3) problematic wording and meaning (Nur Muhammad Anas & Mohd Arif, 2023).

Fabricated Hadiths In Malaysia-Indonesia

Fabricated hadiths are sayings, actions, or tacit approvals that are falsely attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, either deliberately or mistakenly (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, 1966; al-Sakhāwī, 1968; al-Suyūṭī, 1959). The emergence of fabricated hadiths was in fact forewarned by the Prophet himself in a narration: "*At the end of times, there will be great liars who will come to you with hadiths which neither you nor your forefathers have ever heard. So beware of them and let them not mislead you or cause you to fall into tribulation.*" (Muslim)

According to al-Sibā'ī (1976), the year 40 AH marks the beginning of the appearance of fabricated hadiths. At that time, the political conflict between the followers of 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib and Mu'āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān significantly contributed to the emergence of various sects in both political and religious spheres ('Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb, 2006). As stated by 'Umari (1994), the political crises among Muslims led to the rise of sectarian groups such as the Shī'ah and Khawārij, both of which played a major role in the creation and dissemination of fabricated hadiths. Both al-Sibā'ī (1976) and 'Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb (2006) note that these groups exploited the Qur'an and prophetic traditions to justify their ideological agendas. When they could not find suitable textual evidence, they resorted to fabricating hadiths to support their views (al-Sibā'ī, 1976; 'Ajjāj al-Khaṭīb, 2006; 'Umari, 1994).

The proliferation of fabricated hadiths continued to spread globally, and Malaysia-Indonesia have not been spared from this phenomenon. Research findings show that the dissemination of fabricated hadiths in both countries has occurred primarily through two main channels: (1) the written medium such as books and articles and (2) oral transmission such as religious talks, Friday sermons, and other educational settings (Faisal, 2016; Mohd Syukri, 2020; Nur Afifi et al., 2023; Armainingsih & Asrar, 2024). Moreover, the rapid advancement of digital technology, especially through social media, has accelerated the spread of fabricated hadiths among the public in both nations (Nur Afifi et al., 2023; Muhamad Ghifari, 2023).

The author's observations identify two distinct types of fabricated hadiths circulating in Malaysia and Indonesia. The first category includes hadiths fabricated by specific individuals or groups during the early Islamic centuries. These hadiths are well-known and have been documented in classical works such as *al-Mawḍū'āt* by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597 AH), *al-La'ālī al-Maṣnū'ah fī al-Aḥādīth al-Mawḍū'ah* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), and *Tanzīh al-Sharī'ah al-Marfu'ah 'an al-Aḥādīth al-Shanī'ah* by al-Kattānī (d. 963 AH).

The second category comprises fabricated hadiths produced in the contemporary era, often by individuals or groups seeking to promote specific agendas. Typically, these narrations lack any chain of transmission (*isnād*) and must be critically evaluated using the framework of Hadith textual criticism (*naqd al-matn*).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Five selected fabricated hadiths that have been identified as circulating in Malaysia and Indonesia were analysed using a hadith criticism discourse approach. The findings and analyses are as follows:

1) A preacher claimed that one of the characteristics of the Banī Tamīm mentioned in a hadith is that they are like monks at night, like lions during the day, and wear black *songkok* (Nur Ihsan, 2024).

Analysis:

The preacher did not explicitly identify who the Banī Tamīm referred to in the narration. However, the context of the sermon suggests an implicit reference to an ethnic group in the Malay Peninsula. This becomes clearer when he cites “wearing a black *songkok*” as one of the defining traits of the Banī Tamīm (Nur Ihsan, 2024).

The *songkok* is a cultural attire specific to the Malay world, believed to have emerged around the 13th century (Rozan, 2007). In contrast, the Banī Tamīm tribe has existed since pre-Islamic times, long before the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, descending from Tamīm Ibn Murr Ibn ‘Ud Ibn Ṭabikhah Ibn Ilyās Ibn Muḍar Ibn Nazar Ibn Ma‘ad ibn ‘Adnān (Fawzan, 2002; Qahtan & Elaf, 2023; al-Sharanakhi, 2012; Abd al-Qadir, 2002).

Thus, any attempt to associate the cultural practices or physical features of the Banī Tamīm with the *songkok* worn by the Malays is historically and anthropologically unfounded. Furthermore, this represents a form of anachronism, where a cultural element from a much later period is retroactively inserted into a historical narrative from the Prophet’s time.

2) A video claims that the Prophet Muhammad gave advice in a state of wakefulness (*yaqazah*), including the statement: “As long as the taste of coffee remains in your mouth, the angels will seek forgiveness for you” (Ba’abud, 2022).

Analysis:

This narration contains elements of anachronism, particularly the reference to the “taste of coffee.” Coffee, as we know it, was not part of the cultural or dietary practices during the Prophet’s lifetime. According to Ukers (1922), most experts agree that coffee originated in Ethiopia or the Arabian Peninsula and was first used in the 9th century CE. It did not gain popularity in Mecca and Medina until the 15th century CE.

The link between coffee and divine forgiveness appears incongruous and lacks theological basis. Scholars have highlighted that such fabrications often involve exaggerated or implausible benefits attached to mundane actions (Nur Muhammad & Mohd Arif, 2023). Moreover, the claim that this occurred through *yaqazah* (a visionary or waking experience) is problematic, as most hadith scholars reject *yaqazah* as a valid means of hadith transmission.

3) A video asserts: “Sitting briefly in the presence of a *wali* (saint), whether alive or dead, is better than worshipping until your bones are broken” (Sohibul Majalis, 2024).

Analysis:

In Islam, a *wali* is defined as a devout and righteous servant of God (al-Qaradawi, 2015). However, the narration in question reflects excessive veneration (*ghuluw*) by elevating the act of merely sitting in the presence of a *wali* even after death above actual worship of Allah. This contradicts Islamic principles, which place utmost value on sincere and correct acts of worship.

Furthermore, this statement opens the door to doctrinal deviation, particularly extreme grave veneration and sanctification of the dead practices that deviate from Islam's core monotheistic values (*tawhīd*). The reward promised in this narration is also hyperbolic and inconsistent with the balanced teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

4) A video states that the Prophet Muhammad instructed: *"Tell my ummah that whoever glorifies and is thankful for my birth, even those with minor involvement, I will reward them, and their parents and family will be granted intercession into Paradise"* (nusantara_mengaji, 2021).

Analysis:

This narration contains elements that contradict established *Sharī'ah* principles. It offers exaggerated rewards for actions that have no sound basis in Islamic law. In particular, the phrase "whoever glorifies and is thankful for my birth" runs contrary to authentic hadiths in which the Prophet himself warned against excessive veneration.

In an authentic narration, the Prophet Muhammad said: *"Do not overpraise me as the Christians overpraised the son of Mary. Verily, I am only a servant, so say: the servant of Allah and His Messenger."* (al-Bukhārī)

Hence, such fabrications can lead to the erosion of the Prophet's true teachings and promote practices not grounded in the Sunnah.

5) A video claims that there is a hadith stating the Prophet Muhammad wore a cloth garment with trousers underneath. Therefore, it is said that wearing a *sarong* below the knees is a Sunnah act and earns specific rewards (Nur Insan, 2024).

Analysis:

This narration exhibits anachronism by projecting modern or region-specific clothing styles into the Prophet's era. The supposed style of wearing a *sarong* over trousers was not known during the Prophet's time. While Ibn al-Qayyim (1998) did mention that the Prophet Muhammad wore trousers (*sarāwīl*), the specific combination of a sarong over trousers contradicts the dress norms of that historical period.

Moreover, attributing specific *sunnah* rewards to such a practice is unfounded. The Prophet discouraged wearing attire that deviated significantly from the customs of the time (Ibn Mājah & Abū Dāwūd). It is inconceivable that the Prophet would practice what he himself discouraged. Ibn al-Qayyim (1998) also clarified that the Sunnah in clothing is to wear whatever is simple and accessible, as long as it does not contradict *Sharī'ah* guidelines. Hence, assigning a religious reward to the specific act of wearing garments below the knees is unsupported and lacks textual basis.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the discipline of *matn* (content) criticism plays a crucial role in identifying fabricated hadiths that have spread among communities in Malaysia and Indonesia. Through qualitative content analysis, this research successfully highlights key elements that must be considered within the discourse of *matn* criticism. The findings confirm the importance of applying several evaluative principles, including contradiction with authentic sources such as the Qur'an and *ṣaḥīḥ* hadiths, inconsistencies with established historical facts and local cultural norms, conflicts with sound human reasoning, and violations of the fundamental principles of Islam.

The impact of this study extends beyond strengthening the methodology of *matn* criticism as developed by classical hadith scholars. It also contributes to contemporary scholarly discourse aimed at curbing the spread of false religious information in the digital era.

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