

"Jauh berjalan banyak dilihat, lama hidup banyak dirasa". Merupakan pepatah lama bangsa Indonesia. Ungkapan bijak ini secara indah meringkaskan relevansi ruang dan waktu dengan kehidupan sukses dan bermakna. Ungkapan tersebut menekankan fakta bahwa kualitas dibangun berdasarkan atas pengalaman yang ditemukan di berbagai tempat dan waktu. Artikel ini berusaha untuk mengungkapkan kenyataan historis dari filsafat ini berkenaan dengan ruang dan waktu dalam tradisi intelektual Muslim klasik. Arti penting petualangan dan pengembaraan yang dilakukan demi karier intelektual menemukan ekspresinya dalam praktik yang disebut *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* (harfiah, pengembaraan ilmiah). Pembahasan ini akan difokuskan pada dasar-dasar ajarannya, perkembangannya historisnya, dan fungsinya dalam tradisi intelektual Muslim klasik.

Keyword: *Riḥlah 'ilmīyah, adventure, travel, Muslim intellectual, tradition, education.*

RIḤLAH 'ILMĪYAH: DYNAMISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM OF CLASSICAL MUSLIM EDUCATION

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Hasan Asari

Dosen Pascasarjana dan Fakultas Tarbiyah IAIN SU Medan

The Meaning and Doctrinal Roots of *Riḥlah 'ilmīyah*

It is not easy to define *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* precisely. Classical sources used it in a very free manner, referring to various activities and situations. *Riḥlah* is a derivative word from the root *r-h-l*. *Lisân al-'Arab* gives many derivative words from this root, encompassing a very rich possibility of usages.¹ As a matter of fact, the term *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* is applied

¹ Jamal al-Dīn Abū al-Faḍl ibn Manẓūr, *Lisân al-'Arab* (Mesir: Al-Dār al-Miṣriyah li al-Ta'līf wa al-Tarjūmah, n.d.), vol. XIII, pp. 291-297.

any traveling made by someone to seek knowledge, to seek a better place of learning, to seek a more authoritative teacher, or a travel by a scholar to different places whether or not he is formally undertaking any academic activity. Therefore, *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* might refer to a well-planned journey for academic purposes (learning, teaching, seeking books, attending academic meeting, etc.), or any journey made by those involving in academic activities.

Perhaps an exact and clear-cut definition will not help that much. The history of Islamic civilization assure us that *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* was practiced very extensively in classical Islam. An author even goes to say that it became a very important feature of classical Islamic education.²

The roots of the practice of *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* could be found in the Qur'an and the *ḥadīths*, that is to say in the very center of Islamic doctrines. Some Qur'anic verses emphasize that this world is so wide and people are encouraged to travel from one place to another.³ A famous tradition from the Prophet orders Muslims to seek knowledge, even if they have to go to China for that purpose: "Seek knowledge even if it be in China."⁴ The specific *reference* to China must have had special meaning, considering that Muhammad lived in the 7th century Arabia. *First*, China is recorded by the history of humanity as one of the centers of ancient civilizations. By the beginning of the 1st century A.D., the Chinese had discovered the technology of making papers, and by the end of the 2nd they started printing books. And, as history illustrates, it was from the Chinese that the Arab Muslims learned about papers as well as gunpowder.⁵ *Second*, geographically, China was the remotest among the ancient civilizations from which the emerging Islamic civilization

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² Sam I. Gellens, "The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach," in D.F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (eds.) *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and Religious Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 55.

³ See, for example, Q.S. al-Nisā'/4: 97; and al-Ankabūt/29: 56.

⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa-Faḍliḥ wa-mā Yanbaghī fi Riwayatih wa-Ḥamlīh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, n.d.), vol. I, p. 9.

⁵ Charles van Doren, *A History of Knowledge: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), pp. 154, 179.

was benefiting. In 7th century A.D., when Muhammad was preaching Islam, China must have been considered an extremely far and foreign place. The spirit of the tradition, therefore, is very clear: distance should not be an obstacle in seeking knowledge; Muslims must go anywhere for knowledge and undergo whatever it takes to do that.

The Qur'an and *ḥadīṣ* shape the Islamic spirit and outlook regarding knowledge. The demand to travel for knowledge is not more than practical part of the very strong injunction in the Qur'an and *ḥadīṣ* to love, seek, and disseminate knowledge. Based on some Qur'anic verses and *ḥadīṣ* that are specifically related to *riḥlah 'ilmīyah*, and well aware of the general spirit of Islam regarding knowledge, some ulama developed their views that are strongly supportive of the practice.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, for instance, casts a very positive view about *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* and considers it as an important factor in supporting one's success in learning. The great historian, Ibn Khaldūn, also emphasizes the benefits of this practice.⁶ Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī holds the opinion that *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* is very relevant especially in the field of *ḥadīṣ*. He even wrote a book specifically devoted to the theme.⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr includes an interesting chapter regarding the practice of *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* in his well-known work, *Jāmi Bayān al-'Ilm wa-Ḥamlihi wa-mā Yanbaghī fi Riwayatih wa-Ḥamlihi*.⁸ As will be seen in the coming pages, those ulama did not advance mere theoretical statements, but practiced *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* themselves very extensively.

The Development of *Riḥlah 'Ilmīyah*

It seems practically impossible to determine the first time *riḥlah 'ilmīyah* was performed. Nevertheless, from his biography, we learn that the Prophet Muhammad send some of his companions to different

⁶ Hasan Asari, Nukilan Pemikiran Islam Klasik: Gagasan Pendidikan al-Ghazali (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1999), pp. 93-94.

⁷ Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *al-Riḥlah fi Talab al-Ḥadīṣ* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1975).

⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jamr*, vol. I, pp. 111-114.

part of Islamic world to teach Islam to the local population. The most popular case would be when Muhammad sent his companion Mu'âz ibn Jabal to Yemen. This case becomes so popular mostly because of the dialogue between Muhammad and Mu'âz on the latter departure. The dialogue, quoted repeatedly and in different wordings, considered by ulama as the basis to justify *ijtihâd* and rational interpretation of Islamic tenets. We have to note that history books did not report the experience of Mu'âz, or those of other companions, as a *riḥlah 'ilmîyah*. Nonetheless Mu'âz did go to Yemen as a scholar (*'âlim*) with the responsibility of teaching Islam there as well as to function as a judge. Therefore, when we consider the essence of the experience we can apply the term *riḥlah 'ilmîyah* to it. The *khulafâ' al-râsyidun* followed the example of Muhammad in this matter; they send teachers to different areas to ensure that Islam was thought properly and that legal problem of the population was settled according to the principle of Islam.

4 From certain perspectives, these examples set by the Prophet and his early successors became the foundation on which the practice grew throughout the classical history of Islamic education. The Prophet and his closest companions are the top authority on religious matters. So, when they decided to send someone, they certainly opted the most suitable person for the assignment. Aside from its practical function (teaching Islam and performing legal duties), from the perspective of our current discussion, what happened was an active and rather planned distribution of the sources of knowledge (the ulama) to different places.

Through this policy, beside the seats of power (Madinah, Damascus, Baghdad), other minor cities area also becoming the resident of some renown ulama. Those early ulama pave the way to the emergence of new generation of ulama. By the beginning of the 2nd/8th century, cities like Kufah, Basrah, Yemen, Damascus, or Jerusalem, had become centers of learning comparable to Makkah or Madinah. Then, these centers of learning multiply according to the fast development of Islamic civilization in general. This fast development provides a fine background for the development of *riḥlah 'ilmîyah*. People of knowledge travel from

one place to another, seeking a better place to learn, looking for a more authoritative master, experiencing different lifestyles provided by different cities.

The earnest attempt to collect and reconstruct the *ḥadīṣ* of the Prophet was the original driving force of the practice of *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah*. After the codification and standardization of the Qur’an at the time of Usmān ibn ‘Affān, the companions, and later on the *tābi‘īn*, realize the urgent need to collect and select the *ḥadīṣ* as the second source of Islamic teachings. As the companions of the Prophet was living in different part of the Islamic world, the long travel to collect the *ḥadīṣ* became unavoidable. The biographies of the early generation of *ḥadīṣ* collectors clearly illustrate that many of them took the responsibility and made long journeys for the sake of the *ḥadīṣ*.⁹

When the generation of *tābi‘īn* took over the task from the generation of companion, the distance that had to be covered grew farther and farther, following the expanding border of the Islamic kingdom and the increasing number of important seats of learning. So, the journey to pursue *ḥadīṣ*, to collect them, and later on to codify them was the first practical form of *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah* in the intellectual history of classical Islam.

From a practice in the field of *ḥadīṣ*, the practice *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah* developed very quickly. Some ulama who were not specializing in *ḥadīṣ* studies soon realized the benefits that can be gained from the practice; and they started to practice it too. After all, almost all Islamic branches of knowledge related to *ḥadīṣ* in one way or another. It did not took too long before *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah* become a very important part of intellectual activities in all fields of study.

⁹ As an illustration, Ibn al-Daylami who lived in Jerusalem, Palestine, had doubt regarding a *hadīṣ* that says praying in Bayt al-Maqdis worths more than a thousand prayers in other places except in the Ka’bah. As far as his knowledge this *hadīṣ* was related by Abdullah b. ‘Umar who lived in Madinah. To ascertain that he set out for Madinah, where he learns that Abdullah had moved to Makkah. He continued his *riḥlah* to Makkah only to find that the man he was seeking did not live in Makkah but in a village named Al-Waht. In the end, he arrived at Al-Waht and met Abdullah b. ‘Umar, who, however, denied to have related the *ḥadīṣ*. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *al-Riḥlah*, pp. 137-138. Some other interesting instances could be found in *Ibid.*, pp. 160-170.

Examples of *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* can be found easily by reading the biographies of scholars from the classical period. And we are very fortunate to have those biographies well recorded in the biographical dictionaries (*tabaqat, tarajim*). While reading the travels made by past masters, most of the time we are fascinated by their mobility. Many of the classical ulama were born and started his career as a student at a corner of the Islamic kingdom, then started a long and extensive intellectual journey covering most of the civilized world of his time. Some times they passed away in a place so far from his homeland. Some of them died in his very homeland, but after completing a very long way of traveling.

Below are some biographies to illustrate the mobility of classical Muslim ulama. The following information on the travel of Al-Ghazālī, Ibn al-ʿArabi, Al-Jurjani, and Ibn Khaldun has been adapted (with some minor modifications) from an interesting map by Francis Robinson.¹⁰

6 *Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111)*

This very popular multi-discipliner scholar was born 1058 in Ṭūs, Khurāsān; at a very early age he went to Jurjan, 1073; after some journey in the region of Khurasan, he was known to be a professor at the Nizamiyah Madrasah in Baghdad in 1091; but later on decided to leave this capital of civilization behind, and in 1095 headed for Damascus; from there, during 1095-1095 he visited Jerusalem, Iskandariyah, then Madinah and Makkah, before returning to Damascus; in 1097 al-Ghazali was back in Baghdad, but then decided to return to his hometown, Tus; in 1196, for a short period of time, he accepted the professorship of the Nizamiyah Madrasah, Nisyapur; toward the end of his career he, once more, returned to Tus, and stayed there until his death in 1111.

¹⁰ Francis Robinson, *Atlas of the Islamic World Since 1500* (New York: Facts on File, 1982), p. 32.

Muḥy al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240)

Ibn ‘Arabī was born in 1165 in Murcia, Andalusia; in 1173 he moved to Seville, another Andalusian city; in 1194 he crossed Gibraltar Strait and known to be in Tunis (North Africa); then in 1195 he was in Fez (North Africa); in 1199 he visited Cordova and Almeria (short return to Andalusia); in the same year (1199), he crossed the strait again, to Tunis; in 1202 he headed to the east: 1202, Cairo (Egypt); 1202, Jerusalem (Palestine); 1202-1204, further east, Makkah (Hijaz); from 1204-1205, he visited Baghdad (Iraq), Mosul, and Malatya; 1204-1209, Konya (Anatolia); 1205-1209, Cairo, Jerusalem, Makkah; 1211, Baghdad; 1212, Aleppo (Syria); 1215, Aksaray, Sivas (Anatolia); 1216-1229, Malatya; 1229-1240, the final period of his life was spent in Damascus.

‘Abd al-Raḥmân ibn Khaldûn (1332-1406)

This scholar who made his reputation primarily through his *magnum opus*, *Al-Muqaddimah*, was born in 1332 in Tunis, North Africa; in 1349 he moved to one of intellectual centers of North Africa, Fez; in 1352 he moved to Biskarah; in 1353 returned to Bijayah; in 1354 back to Fez for some times; in 1362 cross the Gibraltar to Andalusian city of Granada; in 1365 returned to Bijayah for a second time; in 1366 he again lived in Biskarah; but in 1372 our man is reported to be back in Fez; in 1375 he made a short return to Granada, across the strait, but at the same year he headed for Frenada until 1379; from 1379-1382 Ibn Khaldun lived in his hometown, Tunis, before deciding to make a *riḥlah* toward the eastern part of the Islamic kingdom; in 1382, he was known to have reached Cairo, another city of learning and civilization that held him for quite some time; in 1400, he started another short travel to the east, this time to Damascus, and went on to Hijaz; from Hijaz he decided to return to Cairo and lived there to the end of his life; he died in 1406.

Al-Sayyid al-Syarīf al-Jurjânī (1339-1413)

Al-Jurjânī was born in 1339 in a small town called Tajū, Jurjan, southeast of the Caspian Sea. In 1365 he was reported to have traveled

to Herat; then in 1368 to Kirman; then in 1371 to Cairo, a dream town of scholars of his time; from Cairo he traveled west to Constantinople; in 1377, he headed for Syiraz; and then in 1378 to Samarqand; after some time, in 1404, he returned to Syiraz where he spent the final years of his life and died in 1413.

If the examples are scholars from the central land of Islam, it does not mean that Muslim scholars from other part of the Islamic world did not take part in the practice of *riḥlah 'ilmîyah*. The excellent study of Azyumardi Azra that focuses on the 17th and 18th centuries Nusantara clearly demonstrate the high mobility of scholars from this particular part of the Islamic world. Their mobility is in fact comparable to those examples given above.¹¹

The career of Nûr al-Dîn al-Rânîrî (d. 1658), for example, shows that he traveled very extensively in centers of learning of the Indian Subcontinent, Sumatra, Malay, as well as Hijaz. Another scholar from Nusantara, Muhammad Yusuf al-Maqassari (d. 1699), made an amazing travels during his life that include Ceylon, and South Africa, apart from cities of Celebes, Java, Sumatra, the Indian Subcontinent, and Hijaz.¹²

Classical Muslim scholars gave high value to mobility and dynamism. The foregoing examples show that they mostly seek knowledge and disseminate it to different places throughout their careers. Some of the most prominent scholars can be said to have visited and absorbed the culture of all civilized world of the time. If we take the state of transportation technology of the time, their travels become even more fascinating. It is most certain that behind these high mobility lays a strong determination and uncompromising spirit regarding the importance of *riḥlah 'ilmîyah* to the advancement of knowledge. It is also not surprising that *riḥlah 'ilmîyah* facilitated them to become scholars who were well aware

¹¹ Azyumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII dan XVIII: Melacak Akar-Akar Pembaruan Pemikiran Islam di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 297-298.

of many situations, cultures, traditions, and schools of thought. Their *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* and the resulting experience added their quality as scholars.

An interesting question should be asked at this point, i.e.: what are the factors that facilitate the development of *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* within the classical Islamic civilization? The available sources usually note the extensive practice of *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* without any interest to explain the factors that support the practice. Nevertheless, through an extensive reading of history works, especially biographical dictionaries, we can extract some information that indicate the supporting factors behind the practice of *riḥlah ʿilmīyah*:

1. General attitude of the society to people of learning, seekers of knowledge, reputable scholars, and others who in one way or another contribute to the advancement of knowledge. We have abundant reports that show how different segments of the society support intellectual activities. Well-to-do individuals and political elites would spare good amount of their wealth as endowment to support education. For example, we have a report that a certain wealthy man called Badr ibn Hasanawayh al-Kurdi (d. 979) spent a huge amount of money to build hundreds of motels (*khân*) for travelers for intellectual purposes or otherwise.¹³ Many caliphs and viziers did the same. This supportive attitude was so common that a traveler did not have difficulties wherever he goes in the Islamic kingdom. A scholar usually receive warm acceptance from local population, because in Islam knowledge and knowledgeable people are to be respected.¹⁴

¹³ George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981), p. 29.1

¹⁴ Most of paedagogical works include chapters on the necessity to respect knowledge and the ulama. We can see these for example in Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Jamiʿ*; Badr al-Din Ibn Jamaʿah, *Tazkirat al-Samiʿ wa al-Mutakallim fi Adab al-ʿAlim wa al-Mutaʿallim*, edited by ʿAbd al-Amir Syams al-Din (Beirut: Dar Iqraʾ, 1986); ʿAbd al-Karim al-Sarrfani, *Adab al-ʿImlaʿ wa al-Istimlaʿ*, edited by ʿAbd al-Amir Syams al-Din, in *al-Fikr al-Tarbawi ʿind ʿAbd al-Karim al-Sarrfani fi Kitābih Adab al-ʿImlaʿ wa al-Istimlaʿ* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-ʿAlami, n.d.); Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Fatihāt al-ʿUlum* (Egypt: Matbaʿat al-Husayniyah al-Misriyah, 1322H).

2. Political integrity of the classical Muslim world. This was a great benefit available for the classical generation. At its height, Islamic civilization dominated a very wide territory, extending from the Iberian Peninsula (Andalusia), North Africa, Egypt, Arabian Peninsula, Persia, Transoxiana, Afghanistan, Sind, Hind, down to the Malay-Nusantara region. This huge territory was pretty much integrated and thus open to all travelers. Of course there were political boundaries, but usually those boundaries bound only as far as political matters were concerned. They did not prevent scholars from moving around to places of their interests. A scholar of Andalusian origin would consider North Africa, Persia, and Anatolia as mere parts of his big residence. He was free to make journeys to any place he deemed necessary for his intellectual career. The concept of citizenship, as developed in the contexts of modern nation-states, were not known during the classical period of Islam, especially when related to intellectual matters. The whole world is open for a scholar of classical Islam, as illustrated by our examples above. We might also emphasize that during the time of our concern many political struggles and wars took place in different area, but they did not prevent those scholars from doing their *rihlah*.
3. General flourishing of Islamic civilization in classical period. At a more general level, the practice of *rihlah 'ilmîyah* was possible because it was facilitated by the general civilization itself. In other words, different factors provide good opportunity for people to travel. As has been mentioned, the integrity of Islamic world allowed people to move freely. Nothing would prevent someone to travel from the very west point of Andalusia to the very east spot of the Malay-Nusantara region. Another significant aspect was that normally, as human history illustrate, an advanced civilization tend to be dynamic socially—the population does not stay foot in one place but rather migrate and move around, temporally or permanently. Culturally, every advanced society is open to others from outside of itself. Financial support was available and many Islamic dynasties were

known to have developed excellent economy. Although scholars were not known as wealthy people, they generally could support *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah* they want. A scholar could do *riḥlah ‘t/miyah* on his personal expense, or through the help of wealthy individuals.

In short, the classical Islamic civilization provides a milieu that was conducive for the practice of *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah*. This civilization was based on doctrines that support intellectual activities; this civilization provide freedom of movement in a huge geographical space; it also provide a socio-cultural situation that was friendly to travelers; and this civilization provided ample financial support for them. The condition was certainly an excellent place for travelers, including those who did it for intellectual purposes.

The Functions of *Riḥlah ‘Ilmīyah*

The practice of *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah* played some functions in classical Islamic civilization. Apart from some purely intellectual functions, *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah* seems to play some wider function as well. The following are some of the most important functions of *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah*:

1. As a way of finding a better qualified teacher. For a seeker of knowledge (*tālib al-‘ilm*), a well-qualified teacher is a precondition for his success. Therefore, in classical Muslim education, a student would normally take the burden of making a long travel to seat at the feet of reputable scholar. In many instances a student who has completed his study under a certain teacher, would ask his teacher's recommendation regarding his further study and seek advice in deciding the next teacher he should study under. In such situation, it was very common for a teacher to recommend his own teacher or his fellow scholar. Following his former teacher's recommendation, a student might have to do a long *riḥlah ‘ilmīyah*. In classical Muslim education, the number and the reputation of one's teacher was very highly appreciated, usually more than the institution in which one

studied.¹⁵ And this helps explain why some students were ready to move from one teacher to another in order to perfect his learning. The high value of personal contacts between teacher and student in the classical Muslim education contributes to the popularity of *riḥlah ʿilmīyah*. Learning through books, while being acknowledged as a legitimate way, was not recommended as long as personal direct meeting with the authors is possible. So, in many cases, one would try his best to meet a reputable scholar even when he already studied his books thoroughly. Imam al-Syāfiʿī, for example, had read and memorized the entire *al-Muwaṭṭaʿ*, but still felt the necessity of meeting and studying under direct guidance of the author, Imām Malik ibn Anas.¹⁶

2. As a way of widening one's perspective and intellectual horizon. Through *riḥlah ʿilmīyah* one is exposed to new experiences. Within the boundaries of classical Islamic world, one could find many kinds of peoples, a wide variety of intellectual traditions, many colors of culture that made up the civilization of classical Islam.¹⁷ Through an extensive traveling a scholar exposed himself to those cultures and intellectual traditions, and by so doing expand his perspective and enrich his experiences. Experiences lead to maturity of a scholar. Social, cultural, religious contacts that one get in his travel contribute to his quality as scholar. Taking the size of Islamic territory, it would seem that an average human life span is not enough to allow one to absorb all the richness it offered. Classical Muslim scholars made use of this wide geography to build their experience and knowledge. Learning knowledge and staying in one place was not the ideal type

¹⁵ Hasan Asari, "Etika Akademis Dalam Islam: Studi Tentang *Tazkirat al-Sami' wa al-Mutakallim* Karya Ibn Jama'ah (w. 733/1333)" (Disertasi: IAIN Jakarta, 2000), pp. 45-46.

¹⁶ Syams al-Din Ahmad ibn Khallikan, *Wafayatal-A'yan wa-Anba'Abna'al-Zaman*, edited by Ihsan 'Abbas (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1977), vol. IV, p. 164.

¹⁷ Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, n.d.), pp. 594-595.

of scholars for them. A scholar was reported to constantly encourage his students to travel for the sake of knowledge.¹⁸

3. As a media of knowledge transmission. *Rihlah 'ilmîyah* played a great part in the process of knowledge transmission in the classical Muslim intellectual tradition. The ulama were constantly moving from one place to another, bringing with them their knowledge. *Rihlah 'ilmîyah* meant distribution of books; as a matter of fact, it explains how a interesting work can be read in many parts of the Islamic world in a relatively short period of time from the publication of the work.¹⁹

A good traveler often produce excellent notes about different things he experienced during his travel. In many cases, those travel notes were later on developed and refined into a comprehensive book, describing many aspects of life in the areas the author visited. The most popular example of this is perhaps the travel notes of the renown Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Batutah (d. 1377) that contains a very rich information about many part of the Islamic world.²⁰ We can also add the book of Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (d. 1048) about India (Hind) which is still appreciated as an important classic work on anthropology.²¹ A good *rihlah 'ilmîyah* provides one good chance to give as well as to collect information. In a more specific context, *rihlah 'ilmîyah* contributes in expanding intellectual networks

¹⁸ Abu Bakr al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tankh Baghdad aw Madinat al-Salam* (Kairo: Maktabat al-Khanji, 1931), vol. XIV, p. 204.

¹⁹ On the distribution of books in classical time, see J. Pedersen, *Fajar Intelektualisme Islam Buku dan Sejarah Penyebaran Informasi di Dunia Arab*, trans. Yuliani Liputo (Bandung: Mizan, 1996), pp. 36-56.

²⁰ His travel note entitled *Tuhfatal-Nuzzar ff Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar*. J. F. P. Hopkins, "Geographical and Navigational Literature," in M.J.L. Young, et al. (eds.) *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 323-324.

²¹ The title of the notes is *Tahqiq ma li al-Hind min Maqulat ff al-'Aql wa al-Marzu'ah* (commonly known as *Kitab al-Hind*). George Saliba, "Al-Biruni and the Sciences of his Time," in M.J.L. Young, et al. (eds.) *Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 416.

involving series of teachers and students that can be very long and complicated.²²

4. As an integrating aspect of Islamic civilization. *Riḥlah ‘ilmîyah* facilitates a lively exchange of information among different parts of the Islamic world. Through this exchange different regions learn from one another and mutually enrich their knowledge and experience. Those who made *riḥlah ‘ilmîyah* include top scholars of the time. Therefore, it is safe to say that *riḥlah ‘ilmîyah* contribute in maintaining the unity of the Islamic world. If those travelers left permanent footsteps on every road they followed; and if we were able to see those footsteps, they would certainly make crisscrossing lines that hold Islamic world in one unity of civilization. We have so far tried to illustrate how *riḥlah ‘ilmîyah* became very popular among scholars and seekers of knowledge in the classical period of Islam, showing their commitment for creativity and mobility. Through *riḥlah ‘ilmîyah* information transmitted, knowledge disseminated, shared, exchanged, developed, and civilization united. The travelers benefited greatly from their *riḥlah ‘ilmîyah* in the form of new experience and wider perspective. The wider society benefited as well by having the opportunity to learn from scholars of foreign origin.

With its significant contribution to classical Islamic society, it is perhaps a wise thought to reconsider this practice in the context of contemporary Muslim intellectual activities. Certainly information technology has change traditional modes of knowledge transmission greatly. Computer and the internet, for example, contribute greatly in accelerating the process of storing and retrieving information. Yet, acquiring knowledge from digital lines cannot be compared to experiencing the knowledge in real life. A Muslim scholar should

²² A very interesting study on intellectual networks of the Nusantara has been made available by Azra, *Jaringan Ulama*.

always stresses the importance of experience acquired through extensive traveling, because the richness of experience contains spirit of freedom and creativity. The importance of traveling has been immortalized in an old Malay wise saying: “Jauh berjalan banyak dilihat, lama hidup banyak dirasa.”[]