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Book Reviews in Malaysian Selected Islamic Periodicals: A Preliminary Observation

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Abstract: In the book world, a book review is a form of literary criticism in which a book is analyzed based on content, style, and merit. It is often carried out in periodicals, as school work, or on the internet. Reviews are also often published in magazines, newspapers and journals. Its length may vary from a single paragraph to a substantial essay. Such a review often contains evaluations of the book on the basis of personal taste. Reviewers, in literary periodicals, often use the occasion of a book review for a display of learning or to promulgate their own ideas on the topic of a fiction or non-fiction work. At the other end of the spectrum, some book reviews resemble simple plot summaries. It becomes one of the main factors to attract people to read thus to ensure that reading habit attitude could be increased among them. Getting reviews were one of the most important parts of the book promotion process because a review in any of these journals (whether good or bad) can generate more attention. Due to this factor, this content analysis determines how book review may contribute to book world and reading cultures and also to investigate the relationship between a book review and book world is carried out. Book reviews require special skills and oblige the reviewer with precise responsibilities. The professional reviewer does not just have to read and scrutinize the text, but to realize concealed, implied meaning the author obviously had dropped hints about. Skilled book reviewers' explanations make the reader feel confident in their perception of the book or change it entirely. The reviewer must also state the main points of the reviewed book. While some aspects are less meaningful, others have to be marked out as prerogative issues. The task is even more complicated as the writer could unintentionally imply the idea the reviewer of the book can notice. This content analysis will look at some promotional mediums that published or discussing book reviews on their media. Book reviews become one of the medium to promote books published in such country for example Oprah Book Club in U.S. Her book club sparked a revolution among readers by bringing serious contemporary novels to the attention of a wider audience that led to instant fame and bestseller status for authors. Oprah books sold an average of 1.4 million copies each. Other than printed and non-printed sources, there are also electronic media that plays a big role in publishing book review on their pages. Due to the vast distribution of book review, people will be aware with the latest topics that were being published. The author and book publishers are going to make profits from a good review which is going to make the parties involved popular, appreciated, respected and accepted by the reader. As the result, the analysis is going to show the favorite topic with a few scopes and characteristic that contributes to the reading cultures particularly in Malaysia. Some publishers were more focusing on promotional activity but this analysis is the first attempt to explore the significant of a book review that will be useful to the book world, readers and authors. This analysis will be the supporting evidence in retaining their effort, motivation and energy in producing the good book review and the betterment of reading cultures. On top of that, they provide a vital service to the publishing industry.
Introduction

Periodical literature (also called a periodical publication or simply a periodical) is a published work that appears in a new edition on a regular schedule. The most familiar examples are the newspaper, often published daily, or weekly; or the magazine, typically published weekly, monthly or as a quarterly. Other examples would be a newsletter, a literary journal or learned journal, or a yearbook. These examples are typically published and referenced by volume and issue. "Volume" typically refers to the number of years the publication has been circulated, and "Issue" refers to how many times that periodical has been published during that year. In the context of this paper, periodicals focus only book reviews appeared in journals.

Book Reviews in Malaysian periodicals has been actively appeared in newspapers compared to book reviews in journals. In Malaysia, there is no comprehensive study on book reviews especially related to Islamic literature in journals.

Book Reviews in Malaysian Newspaper: a Brief Overview

Almost all newspapers and magazines today have a book review. Berita Harian had published reviews of books reviews column called 'Buku', while Utusan Malaysia 'Sehari Sebuah Buku'. It shows how the existence of such column had a good response from audience. Through it, the audiences can find the publication of new books in the market. Malaysia published about 7,000 new book titles in various fields in a year, compared with around 30,000 of Japan's new title. Imagine the number of new books when we take into account all the books publish outside Malaysia in a year. This means that not all book reviews could be covered and extended (Jeniri, 2005). In Malaysia, books that covers Islamic literature generally similar to other books in all category as compared to Harakah which focus solely on Islamic literature.

The Purpose of Book Reviews?

Book reviews not just to satisfy the curiosity of readers but also to inform audiences of new books in the market. This column can be used as a guide to reader to make a selection of books to be purchased. Reviewers can help in fostering interest in reading and promote the books among the community, promote the use of libraries and to stimulate cultural activities through the comments and criticisms in the book. Audiences can make judgments based on that comment. A good book reviews are not only a matter of courtesy given by the publishers or waiting for a new book delivered to his desk. Instead, he should be actively looking for new books in bookstores, in the country or while visiting the major cities of another country. More new and recent books which are good and useful to readers can be put in the list especially for the book lovers that are always eager awaiting the arrival of the latest book.

Some reviews are intended only to introduce the book in brief such as a short commentary as published in ‘Sehari Sebuah Buku’. There is column that tried to discuss critically not only one book but several books at once. Latest book is eagerly awaited by the book lovers. However, reading interest in Malaysia seems to have started by a book reviews column in recent years based on the increased reading interest among Malaysians. In the last two decades, Malaysian society is said to have average in reading two pages of the book a year, but now they had significantly increased to read at least 8 - 12 books a year (National Library of Malaysia, 2007). This number is certainly small considering the thousands of new book titles published every year.

Reviews have their own impact and influence on the readers. Authoritative reviewers will have greater influence such as Graham Lord in Sunday Express. Each review will be followed by readers of the newspaper.
Good reviews are able to inform the reader a quick content or essence of the book. This is the basic purpose of review. Reviews should be informative so that readers know the content of the book. Due to limited book reviews, reviewers only need to highlight the major issues discussed in the book. Thus, the reader can determine the scope covered to enable them in deciding whether to buy or not. In addition, reviewers have to make brief interpretation and evaluation, especially fiction such as novels and creative works.

If necessary, the reviewer should make a comparison with other books in the same category that have been circulating in the market. Such comparison is deemed as an equal comparison. Teenager’s novel cannot be compared with adult novel also the political novel cannot be compared with the science novel.

In newspapers, there are variety reviews as politics, economics, sports, films, theater, music and also book reviews. Book reviews emerged as one of the genre that has its own privileged. A good book reviews sometimes can match the book itself. Thus the book reviewer had an important place in journalism. Book reviews also appeared in journals and magazines and the importance of a book reviews is in the newspapers because it displays the latest books and reflects the latest thinking in the book world.

Unfortunately in Malaysia, has yet to appear a good and respected book reviewer. Book reviews is still focus on promotional aspect and still at the stage of introductory level, rather than deep reviewing on itself. Writing reviews of books has its own art. Book reviews covers all aspects of the book, from idea to technical content. Book reviews is just one aspect of the journalism. In addition to reviews books, there are other matters including, news about the world of books, such as articles, libraries, book lovers, ‘book trailers’, publishers and all issues related to the world of books.

Reviews in Utusan Malaysia

Leading newspaper, Utusan Malaysia also has its own book column called ‘Buku’, published every Monday on page 11 in the Op-ed column, the editorials and opinions. In addition to the book reviews, Utusan Malaysia also has a small column every day called Sehari Sebuah Buku published every day from Tuesday to Friday. From time to time, there are literary books under review in the Arts column. Current setback is the lack of contributors to fill in the needs of book communities. Newspapers only reflect the issues in society. If the book communities are small, then that is reflected in the press.

Book Reviews and Books in Civilize Society

The most important column in the newspapers is the book reviews because it’s reflected the country and world civilization. If the book column in a newspaper of a country is active, it would reflect the intellectual development in the countries. In United Sates of America (US) leading newspapers such as The New York Times has a strong tradition of books reviews called New York Book Review. British newspaper, The Times not only has a high quality book column, but the city of London has its own London Book Review. It reflects the culture and civilization of a developed country. This is because the column reflects the book communities of the country (Zin Mahmud, 2007).

If Malaysia intends to become a developed country by the year 2020, it must not only have the world-class economy but also a strong tradition of book reviews.

Consequently, the book communities in Malaysia must attained the level of book communities as in developed countries. Book lover in Malaysia, not only need to increase their members but also need to have a lot of high quality and active members. Only good books will attract the book community to read that focus high-quality books reviewed in the newspaper. Finally, Vision 2020 can see the emergence of a civilize society. More book lovers need to be nurtured. They are the ones who support the book industries such as libraries and bookstores especially second-hand bookshop.
If a lot of second-hand bookshop in the country appears, it indicates Malaysia has reached the level of developed countries and first class mentality as required by the nations. This shall be marked by the presence of the book lovers; particularly those possessed a strong passion for books.

Islamic civilization reached its peak at the era of ‘Abasiah Caliphate’ where book traditions become part of the society thirst for knowledge. Unfortunately, Mongols destroyed Baghdad and by destroying the books to Dajlah river.

The emergence of every civilization such as Greek and Roman was based on their obsession for books that gave birth to many libraries throughout the empire. The largest is the Library of Alexandria. Western civilization is rooted by the emergence of many libraries set up by the book lovers. Their passion for books has created a special segment of society that finally introduces the terms bibliomania, biblioholic and bibliophile.

Islam and Civilisational Renewal (ICR): a journal devoted to contemporary issues and policy research

ICR is an international peer-reviewed journal published quarterly by Pluto Journals for the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. It carries articles, book reviews and viewpoints on civilisational renewal and aims to promote advanced research on the contribution of Muslims to science and culture.

ICR takes a comprehensive approach to civilization renewal (tajdid hadari) in an effort to respond positively to the challenges of modernity, post-modernity and globalization. The journal seeks to advance critical research and original scholarship on theoretical, empirical, historical and comparative studies, with a focus on policy research. It plans to advance a refreshing discourse for beneficial change, in the true spirit of the Islamic principles of tajdid (renewal) and (improvement and reform) through exploring the best contributions of all school and currents of opinion.

ICR is non-political and non-sectarian, and welcomes contributions from a broad spectrum of scholars, community leaders and writes regardless of religious persuasion and creed. Journal of Civilisation Studies (JCS) aims at stimulating creative and original contributions within contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship to further civilizational renewal. JCS promote advanced research on the civilizational progress of Muslims and critical assessment of modernity post – modernity and globalization.

So far 8 issues of ICR have been published as follows:
1. Volume 1, number 1, October 2008
2. Volume 1, number 2, December 2009
3. Volume 1, number 3, April 2010
4. Volume 1, number 4, July 2010
5. Volume 2, number 1, October 2010
6. Volume 2, number 2, December 2010
7. Volume 2, number 3, April 2011
8. Volume 2, number 4, July 2011
JAWHAR: Journal of Book Review

JAWHAR is a bilingual Journal of Book Review published triannually by The Academy for Civilisation Studies and issued in February/March, June/July, and October/November. It is a collection of review articles written by reviewers who are mostly academicians in their fields of expertise. Books that are the focus of their interest include among others philosophy, religion, science and humanities. The Academy is an organization that serves as a platform and a venue to consolidate their intellectual resources in various fields of studies and orientation. Aside from JAWHAR, the Academy also publishes monographs, books, and news bulletins. They invite local as well as overseas publishers to send in two copies of book for each title from their latest publications to allow them to review and publish them in their forthcoming issues.

PROBLEMS

As an academic vehicle, Islamic journal undoubtedly play an important role in religious communication. And with the development of research, Islamic journals have also undergone rapid development; there are still problems, however, including limited regional authorship, lack of individuality, small circulation, and a tendency toward pan-politicization, that hinder the further development of this journals.

Lack of contributors and poor reviewing

Lacking in contributors and poor reviewing has always be a problem to any journals publications. If there is such a contribution, the reviews does not meet the standard of a good book reviews. A good book reviews must focus on latest book available in the market, avoid reviewing books that already published in any periodicals etc. (Roosfa Hashim, 2009). Poor reviewing also not focus on current issues, did not meet the needs and interest of the readers.

Problem in Editorial Policy in Malaysia

There is no clear editorial policy emphasis on Islamic Book Review. As a result, a special attention is not given and normally book review is treated marginally. According to Osman Bakar (2011), book reviews should be a tradition of any scholarly Islamic journal. For example, Muslim World Book Review that specialized in Islamic book reviews. The Muslim World Book Review (MWBR) (2011) containing an Index of Islamic Literature, a leading quarterly journal published by the Islamic Foundation, is a unique source of information for those concerned with developments in the Muslim world.

Recent publications in the field are listed and important books are reviewed by eminent scholars and writers, critically analyzing views expressed in both the East and the West on a variety of issues. Each issue is rich in information, criticism and suggestions. The section containing the Index of Islamic Literature brings the same norms of academic rigor and analytical clarity to the field of bibliography. Recognizing that bibliographies function as ideological statements, the Index acts in the service of Muslim scholarship.

Resign and deceased

Another issue is that if the member that sits in the editorial board resigns or deceased, then the publication stops. A clear example is JAWHAR (Journal of Book Review)
Editorial professionalism

In most editorial board, there is no specialization of work that focuses only on acquisition of article. Their tasks specialize on getting the article, meeting the deadline because getting the right reviewer is an art by itself that focus on the book reviews (Roosfa Hashim, 2011).

Financial Constraints and distribution

In the context of economics of publishing, the journals cannot sustain and maintaining the continuity of the journal. There is no marketing officer to tackle marketing and distributions of journal. As a result, the visibility of the journal is unknown. To sustain is very hard and most of the journal ended in storeroom.

Suggestion

High priority to book review

Although ICR is not specialize in reviewing books but high priority is given to book reviewing. It is the normal practice the books be reviewed and appeared only once in journal and not been consequently appeared in another series or no continuity (Osman Bakar, 2011). It a high time for journals to have a specialize book reviewer.

Research

More studies must be conducted in the area of book reviewing due to lack of literature in it and because book review is an art by its own, so more comprehensive study should be undertaken.
References


