

## อักษรไทยที่ด้านขวา

## JAWI SCRIPT IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

## នរោត្តម ឥឡូចា\*

Nurham Hahsa\*

นักวิชาการอุดมศึกษาชำนาญการ  
คณะศึกษาศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตปัตตานี  
Professional Level, Academic Officer

\*Corresponding Author, E-mail: nurham.h@psu.ac.th

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## บทคัดย่อ

อักษรไทยเป็นระบบการเขียนภาษาลາຍหรือภาษาอື່ນ ๆ ທີ່ໃຫ້ວັນອັນດັບປັບປຸງເປັນພື້ນຖານ  
ມີບຫບາທສຳຄັງທາງວັດນອຣມແລະປະວັດສາສົກຮອງປະເທດຕ່າງໆ ໃນເອເຊີຍຕະວັນອັກເສີຍໃຕ້ທີ່ຕັ້ງອູ່  
ໃນຄາບສຸມທຽມລາຍ ຮວມເຖິງປະເທດໄທທີ່ມີສັກຄົມມຸສລິມ ຜຶ່ງໃຊ້ພາສາລາຍໃນການສື່ສາຮອູ່ເປັນຈຳນວນນາກ  
ທີ່ດ້າມຂວານໄທຍ້ອ່າທາງການໃຫ້ຂອງປະເທດໄທ ໂດຍການມື່ອຍ້ອງອັກຊະຍາວີໃນພື້ນທີ່ດັ່ງກ່າວ ຜິ້ໃຫ້ເຫັນເຖິງ  
ຄວາມໜັກໜາຍຂອງພາສາແລະອິທີພລທາງວັດນອຣມຈາກອົດສູ່ປັຈຈຸບັນ ບທຄວາມນີ້ໄດ້ຮັບຮຸມຂ້ອມຸລ  
ເກີ່ວກັບທີ່ມາ ວິວັດນາການ ແລະຄວາມເກີ່ວຂ້ອງຮ່ວມສັນຍາຂອງອັກຊະຍາວີ ດ້ວຍການນຳເສັນອ້າມຸລແລະມຸມອອງ  
ຕ່າງໆ ຈາກຜລງນາທາງວິຊາກາຮອງຜູ້ເຂົ້າວັດນອຣມ ເຖິງແມ່ວັດຊະຍາວີໃນປັຈຈຸບັນຈະມີບຫບາທນ້ອຍລົງໃນສັກຄົມ  
ມຸສລິມຂອງໄທຍ ທ່ານຜູ້ຄົນຍັງຄົງຮໍາຮັງໄວ້ຈຶ່ງຄວາມດົກທາງພາສາທີ່ຄູກຂານນາມວ່າ ຍາວີ

คำสำคัญ: อักษรไทย ภาษาไทย ด้วยภาษาไทย

## Abstract

The Jawi script, an Arabic based script writing system in Malay and other languages, has played a significant cultural and historical role across Southeast Asian nations. Southeast Asian nations in the Malay Archipelago, including Thailand where many Muslim communities in the southern part of the country use the Malay for communication. The presence of Jawi in Southern Thailand reflects the linguistic diversity and cultural influences that persist today. This article compiles information on the origin, evolution, and contemporary relevance of the Jawi script, presenting various perspectives from the scholarly work of experts. Although the Jawi script currently plays a lesser role in Thailand's Muslim society, people still preserve its linguistic beauty, known as Jawi.

**Keywords:** Jawi Script, Malay Language, Southern Thailand

## Introduction

The Jawi script, used for writing the Malay language and several regional languages, employs Arabic letters. This script is prevalent throughout the Malay Archipelago, which encompasses over 25,000 islands in Southeast Asia and includes Malay-speaking communities in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Timor-Leste, and some provinces in southern Thailand (National Geographic Education, n.d.). In his book *al-Rihlah*, Ibn Battuta (1964) notes that the term "al-Jawah" used by Arabs refers to the region within the Malay Archipelago, while "Jawi" denotes its inhabitants. For centuries, the Jawi script has been central to Malay-speaking communities and is regarded as a significant cultural heritage (Asmah, 1982). Today, Jawi remains vital in the educational and cultural spheres of Malay civilization, particularly in the study of Islamic law, literature, and history (Ahmad et al., 2012).

Musa (2006) explains that the Jawi script originated from the adaptation of the Arabic alphabet to represent the Malay language. To accommodate the phonetic sounds of Malay, five additional letters were incorporated into the original 29 Arabic letters, resulting in a total of 34 characters in the Jawi script. This adaptation highlights the script's uniqueness, tailored to the phonological needs of Malay. The Arabic alphabet, initially comprising 29 letters, now includes six extra letters for Malay phonemes: cha (ڇ), nga (ڻ), pa (ڦ), ga (ڻ), nya (ڻ), and va (ڻ). The following table illustrates the Jawi script's characters:

**Table 1:** Jawi Script Characters and Their Corresponding Sounds

Name	Isolated	Sound represented
alif	ا	/a/ or /ə/
ba	ب	/b/
ta	ت	/t/
sa (tha)	ث	/s/ or /θ/

Table 1: Jawi Script Characters and Their Corresponding Sounds (Cont.)

Name	Isolated	Sound represented
jim	ج	/dʒ/
ca	ق	/tʃ/
ha	ح	/h/ or /ħ/
kha (khO)	خ	/χ/
dal	د	/d/
zal	ذ	/z/ or /ð/
ra (rO)	ر	/r/
zai	ز	/z/
sin	س	/s/
syin	ش	/ʃ/
sad (sOd)	ص	/s/
dad (dOd)	ض	/d/
ta (tO)	ط	/t/
za (zO)	ظ	/z/
ain	ع	/ɣ/
ghain	غ	/ɣ/
nga	ڠ	/ŋ/
fa	ف	/f/
pa	ڦ	/p/
qaf	ڦ	/q/ or /k/
kaf	ڪ	/k/
ga	ڱ	/g/
lam	ڦ	/l/
mim	ڻ	/m/

**Table 1:** Jawi Script Characters and Their Corresponding Sounds (Cont.)

Name	Isolated	Sound represented
nun	ن	/n/
wau	و	/w/ and /u, o, ɔ/
va	ف	/v/
ha	ه	/h/
hamzah	ء	/ʔ/
ya	ي	/j/ and /i, e, ɛ/
nya	ڻ	/ɲ/

**Source:** Author

This table illustrates the characters of the Jawi script, including their isolated forms and the phonetic sounds they represent. The Jawi script is an adaptation of the Arabic script, tailored to meet the phonological requirements of the Malay language. The additional letters included in the script were introduced to represent sounds specific to Malay phonology.

Reading and writing in the Jawi script proceed from right to left, and the script does not distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters. Writing in Jawi involves combining characters or linking letters to form words, which requires merging consonants with vowels or with other consonants to create syllables and words (Isaya, 2010).

### Origins of Jawi Script

The Jawi script originated with Islamic scholars and preachers who resided in the Nusantara region following the arrival of Islam. These scholars studied Islamic sciences through the Quran and hadith in Arabic. Driven by a passion to disseminate Islamic knowledge to the local population in the Malay world, they produced books in the Malay language using Arabic letters, which later evolved into the Jawi script. This development was driven not only by the scholars' desire to spread Islamic teachings but

also by the community's need for Islamic education in their native language without requiring proficiency in Arabic (Borham, 2012).

Hussain (2006) notes that the Jawi script's origins are linked to the influence of Islam in the Malay Archipelago, where Arabic traders and scholars introduced the script for religious and administrative purposes. Asmah (1992) traces the Jawi script's origins to the spread of Islam in the Malay Archipelago during the 13th century. However, al-Fatani (2001) points out that there is no exact date marking the introduction of the Jawi script to the region.

The oldest known Jawi manuscript, *al-Aqa'id al-Nasafi*, is believed to date back to 1590 CE. Additionally, various Jawi writings have been discovered throughout the Malay world, such as the Terengganu Inscription Stone (Prasasti Terengganu) in Malaysia, dated February 22, 1303 CE; the Inscription Stone in Pahang, dated July 9, 1495; and several tombstones in the royal cemeteries of Aceh, Pasai, the Peninsula, and Brunei (al-Fatani, 2001). These findings demonstrate that the Jawi script was widely used across the Malay Archipelago, including Thailand.

In Thailand, the use of the Jawi script has deep historical roots, dating back to the 13th century when Islam was introduced to the Malay Peninsula. Early Thai Muslim communities, particularly in southern Thailand, adopted Jawi for religious and administrative purposes, integrating it into the region's cultural fabric (Syukri, 2005). The script was commonly used in the southern provinces of Thailand, reflecting the influence of Islamic scholarship and trade networks.

Notable scholars from southern Thailand who wrote in Jawi include Syeikh Daud al-Fatani and Syeikh Ahmad al-Fatani. Syeikh Daud al-Fatani's works, such as *Kitab al-Nafahat al-Makkiyyah* and *Muniyat al-Musalli*, have significantly influenced Islamic jurisprudence and education in the Malay world (Mohamed, 2015). Similarly, Syeikh Ahmad al-Fatani's writings, including *Hadiqat al-Azhar* and *Fath al-Mannan*, have

contributed to the development of Islamic thought and scholarship in southern Thailand and Southeast Asia (Ali, 2017).

### Evolution of Jawi Script

The Jawi script has been instrumental in the cultural and linguistic heritage of the Malay world. Its evolution is characterized by various historical and sociocultural factors that have shaped its development over the centuries. With the advent of Islam, there emerged a need for a script to transcribe religious texts and teachings. The Arabic script was adapted to align with the phonetic structure of the Malay language, giving rise to the Jawi script (Sweeney, 1965). This evolution was influenced not only by religious factors but also by the diverse cultures within the Malay Archipelago. The script absorbed elements from local languages, resulting in a distinctive blend of Arabic and indigenous linguistic features (Andaya, 1981). This cultural fusion is evident in the orthographic variations found in historical Jawi manuscripts. Over time, Jawi evolved to accommodate the phonetic peculiarities of the Malay language, becoming a unique script that coexisted with other writing systems in the region (Asmah, 1982).

In the Malay Archipelago, including southern Thailand's provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat, and Satun, the Jawi script is widely used by Malay Muslims (al-Fatani, 2001). For these communities, Islam plays a central role in shaping their identity, and preserving their cultural heritage is vital for maintaining a sense of belonging within broader Thai society. The use of the Jawi script and the practice of traditional customs help reinforce their distinct cultural identity (Awae, 2015). According to Fathurahman (2014), scholars in Patani, Southern Thailand, such as Shaikh Dawud al-Fattani and Shaikh Ahmad al-Fattani, wrote in Malay using the Jawi script. Jawi books authored by Patani scholars were created to cater to the community's needs for religious knowledge, especially for those lacking proficiency in Arabic. This contributed to the development and use of the Jawi script within the Malay community in Southern Thailand. Additionally, the works of scholars and intellectuals who wrote in Jawi played a significant role in the

script's evolution in Southern Thailand. Jawi was crucial in shaping the cultural identity of Malay-Muslim communities, serving as the medium through which religious texts, traditional stories, and historical narratives were recorded and transmitted across generations (Mazlan, 2008). The script's use in manuscripts, religious texts, and educational materials has contributed to the development and preservation of a distinct Malay-Muslim cultural heritage in the region.

Moreover, as a cultural heritage, the Jawi script became the focus of various institutions dedicated to its teaching and development. Establishments such as Pondok's House of Knowledge were pivotal in the education and preservation of the Jawi script. Educational institutions like Tadika and Madrasah greatly supported the preservation of Jawi in southern Thailand during the 20th century (Narongraksakhet et al., 2023). Over the centuries, the Jawi script in Thailand underwent adaptations influenced by the sociopolitical landscape and changing linguistic dynamics. Its incorporation into Thai society extended beyond religious contexts to include commerce, education, and official documentation (Hussain, 2018). The 19th century saw a shift towards the Thai script as the primary written form, yet Jawi persisted in specific contexts, particularly within Muslim communities. As Smith (2010) argues, the coexistence of scripts in Thailand reflects the country's commitment to cultural diversity and religious freedom.

The evolution of the Jawi script reflects the dynamic interplay of religious and cultural influences throughout history. Despite modern challenges, the script remains culturally significant and serves as a tangible link to the region's rich history. Understanding its evolution is essential for appreciating the complexity of cultural and linguistic dynamics in both the Malay Archipelago and southern Thailand.

### Contemporary Relevance of Jawi Script

In contemporary Thailand, the Jawi script continues to hold cultural and linguistic significance, albeit on a smaller scale compared to earlier periods. Efforts to

preserve and promote the script are evident in educational initiatives and cultural programs that aim to sustain the legacy of Jawi (Kadir, 2019). "Malay language and the Jawi script are the mediums of Islamic education," said al-Fatani (2001) in his manuscript. This statement remains true to this day. Islamic education taught in kindergartens, Islamic boarding schools, and private schools in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat uses materials in the Malay language written in Jawi, a script that serves as a significant marker of Islamic identity in the region. This indicates that the Jawi script still exists in the society of Southern Thailand and is predominantly used as a tool for Islamic education. Research findings by Maoti (2014) also prove that the majority of books used in Islamic boarding schools in Narathiwat Province are written in Jawi. In one week, at least eight Jawi-scripted books are studied, most of which are related to religious knowledge.

Despite its cultural and educational importance, the Jawi script encounters challenges that jeopardize its preservation. Modernization, globalization, and the dominance of the Thai script pose significant threats to the continued use and understanding of Jawi (Hussin, 2016). The decline in individuals proficient in Jawi exacerbates these challenges, potentially leading to its gradual extinction. Political and social factors, such as the emphasis on the Thai language in the educational system, contribute to the marginalization of Jawi. Additionally, younger generation in the Southern border provinces of Thailand use Thai language in their daily lives. Sometimes, a mixture of Malay and Thai languages is used. In terms of writing, the influence of the Romanized script is increasing, leading to a decline in the use of the Jawi script in the Malay language (Narongraksakhet et al., 2023).

In contemporary Southern Thailand, efforts are being made to revitalize and promote the use of the Jawi script in educational settings. Advocates argue that maintaining the script's usage is crucial for preserving cultural heritage and fostering a strong sense of identity among Malay-Muslim youth (Abdullah, 2019). Initiatives such as incorporating the Jawi script into school curricula and promoting its use in local media aim to ensure its continued relevance and recognition. This is line in with Ismail (2014)

who indicates that various preservation efforts have been initiated in Southern Thailand to address the challenges facing the Jawi script. Educational institutions, cultural organizations, and community leaders offer courses and workshops on Jawi calligraphy and language to create awareness and foster cultural pride.

In the study of the usage of Jawi script in Khao Toom Subdistrict, Yarang District, Pattani Province by Isaya et al. (2010), it was found that the community continues to widely use the Jawi script in various forms such as documents and signage created by community members. Additionally, it was observed that community members who received religious education are proficient in reading and writing in Jawi script. However, some middle-aged individuals and younger may not be as fluent in reading and writing. The ability of community members to use the Jawi script may be attributed to the continued teaching of the Malay language using the Jawi writing system in religious educational institutions, such as Tadika and Pondok schools. Furthermore, religious textbooks and various Kitabs (books on religion) remain in the Malay language written in Jawi script, thus enabling community members to continue learning and passing down this knowledge. Additionally, there are Friday Khutbah (sermons) readings written in Jawi script, though some contemporary Khutbah books imported from abroad contain terminology that differs from the Patani Malay language.

Given this context, government support is crucial for the preservation of Jawi, advocating for its inclusion in the regional curriculum alongside the Thai script. The challenges faced by the Jawi script in Southern Thailand necessitate collaborative efforts from stakeholders to ensure its preservation. Understanding the historical context, addressing contemporary challenges, and implementing effective preservation strategies are crucial steps in safeguarding this unique cultural heritage. The resilience of the Jawi script depends on the commitment of communities, educators, and policymakers to recognize its value and work collaboratively toward its preservation.

## Conclusion

The Jawi script in Thailand stands as a testament to the dynamic interplay of cultural, religious, and linguistic forces in the region. Its historical roots, evolution, and contemporary relevance offer valuable insights into the diverse heritage of Thailand. As the country continues to navigate the complexities of cultural preservation and linguistic identity, acknowledging the role of the Jawi script provides a holistic understanding of Thailand's rich tapestry of influences. The preservation of the Jawi script in Thailand holds numerous benefits for both the Thai-Muslim community and the nation as a whole. Retaining linguistic diversity contributes to the richness of Thailand's cultural tapestry, showcasing the country's multicultural identity. Additionally, the preservation of Jawi enhances intercultural understanding and promotes tolerance by acknowledging and respecting the linguistic and cultural diversity within the nation.

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