

The Epistemological Foundations of the Tarjih Methodology in Contemporary Muhammadiyah

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Abstract

This article systematically reviews the epistemological foundations of the Tarjih methodology in contemporary Muhammadiyah. Rather than treating Manhaj Tarjih as a list of legal techniques, the review examines the assumptions through which religious knowledge is sourced, validated, integrated, authorized, and revised. The findings identify five connected foundations. First, the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah constitute the normative horizon, but their interpretation is understood as human, fallible, and open to *tajdid*. Second, *bayani* reasoning provides textual, linguistic, hadith-critical, and juristic controls. Third, *burhani* reasoning incorporates rational demonstration, causal explanation, empirical sciences, and multidisciplinary analysis of reality. Fourth, *irfani* reasoning operates primarily as ethical-spiritual vigilance, moderating textual rigidity and rational instrumentalism rather than functioning as an autonomous source of law. Fifth, collective *ijtihad* institutionalizes validation through deliberation, expertise, organizational authorization, and the possibility of revision. *Maqasid* and the hierarchy of basic values, universal principles, and detailed rules mediate the movement from sources to practical judgments. The synthesis characterizes this structure as critical revelational foundationalism combined with spiral epistemic pluralism. Its strength lies in connecting scriptural fidelity with scientific and social knowledge; its principal weakness lies in uneven operationalization, especially of *irfani* reasoning, and insufficient disclosure of how epistemic components are weighted in particular decisions. The article proposes an integrative architecture for evaluating Tarjih decisions as products of institutional epistemic governance.

Keywords: Muhammadiyah; Manhaj Tarjih; epistemology; Islamic legal reasoning; bayani; burhani; irfani; collective ijtihad.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Islamic legal reasoning is confronted by problems whose factual structure, social consequences, and ethical significance cannot be reconstructed from legal texts alone. Questions of medicine, astronomy, disaster governance, environmental resources, finance, technology, public safety, and family life require interaction between revelation, inherited jurisprudence, scientific evidence, and changing institutions. The central problem is therefore epistemological before it is technical: what counts as valid knowledge, how different forms of knowledge are related, and who possesses the authority to transform them into religious guidance.

Muhammadiyah developed Majelis Tarjih as an institutional response to this problem. Tarjih initially referred to comparing competing juristic opinions and selecting the position supported by the stronger proof. With the expansion of Muhammadiyah's educational, social, medical, and public activities, the council was increasingly required to address matters for which a simple comparison of inherited opinions was inadequate. Tarjih consequently developed into a broader form of collective *ijtihad* concerned with religious, social, and humanitarian questions (Djamil, 1995; Abdurrahman, 2002; Anwar,

2018).

The methodological literature often explains this development through lists of sources, approaches, methods, and techniques. The Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah are identified as the sources of Islamic teaching. Bayani, burhani, and irfani are presented as epistemological approaches. Qiyas, maslahah, 'urf, textual reconciliation, preference, and suspension of judgment appear as juristic procedures. Collective deliberation, expert consultation, and organizational authorization provide an institutional setting. These components are important, but listing them does not by itself explain their epistemological relationships.

A narrow representation of Muhammadiyah as a scripturalist movement compounds the problem. The slogan of returning to the Qur'an and Sunnah may be interpreted as if direct access to the texts eliminates the need for theory, intellectual tradition, or contextual knowledge. The formal Manhaj Tarjih does not support such a reduction. It distinguishes the normative authority of revelation from the human activity of interpretation, accepts juristic heritage without binding the organization to one madhhab, and requires relevant scientific knowledge for problems whose objects cannot be understood through textual semantics alone (Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam PP Muhammadiyah, 2012; Anwar, 2018).

The adoption of bayani, burhani, and irfani approaches at the turn of the twenty-first century made the epistemological issue explicit. The terminology was associated in Indonesian Islamic studies with the classification of Arab-Islamic knowledge developed by Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri. Muhammadiyah, however, did not reproduce that classification without modification. The three approaches were reconstructed as complementary dimensions of religious reasoning. Bayani refers to textual and linguistic knowledge; burhani to rational and empirical knowledge; and irfani to spiritual experience, ethical awareness, and the refinement of conscience. Their relationship is described as circular, spiral, or mutually corrective rather than parallel or mutually exclusive (Abbas, 2012; Fanani, 2020).

This integrative ambition raises several questions. If revelation is the normative foundation, what authority is granted to empirical evidence? If burhani reasoning contributes scientific knowledge, can science determine the religious norm or only describe the reality to which the norm applies? If irfani reasoning concerns intuition and spiritual sensitivity, how can it be distinguished from unverifiable subjectivity? If the three approaches are integrated, are they equal in every case, or does their relative importance depend on the object under investigation? The official documents provide general answers, but applied studies reveal different degrees of operational clarity.

The epistemological issue also concerns the status of hadith. Muhammadiyah's formula of Sunnah al-Maqbulah is broader and methodologically more precise than a simple appeal to 'authentic hadith.' The term indicates a process of acceptance based on transmission, corroboration, content, and relationship with stronger evidence. Studies of weak hadith and the use of Sunnah show that the actual epistemic field involves graded probability, cumulative indicators, and critical assessment rather than an absolute division between valid and invalid reports (Rahmanto, 2014; Rosyadi, 2020).

A further foundation is the relationship between values, principles, and detailed rulings. Applied Muhammadiyah fiqh increasingly organizes reasoning through basic values, universal principles, and practical norms. This hierarchy enables decisions to move beyond isolated textual commands and to examine broader purposes such as protection of life, justice, public welfare, environmental responsibility, and social cooperation. Anwar's theory of norm hierarchy provides a conceptual vocabulary for connecting maqasid with concrete rules without treating purpose as an unrestricted license to disregard texts (Anwar, 2016).

Finally, Manhaj Tarjih is not merely an individual epistemology. It is practiced within an organization. The validity of a judgment is shaped by collective deliberation, specialized committees, consultation with scientists and professionals, formal adoption, publication, and possible reconsideration. Institutional process does not convert a weak argument into truth, but it determines which arguments are examined, how disagreement is managed, and when a conclusion becomes authoritative for Muhammadiyah. Epistemology is therefore inseparable from governance.

Although the preceding methodological review mapped the architecture of Manhaj Tarjih, a focused synthesis of its epistemological foundations remains necessary. This article asks four questions: (1) What normative and philosophical assumptions define valid religious knowledge in contemporary Muhammadiyah? (2) How are bayani, burhani, and irfani related in the production of judgments? (3) What roles are played by maqasid, norm hierarchy, and empirical expertise? and (4) How does institutional collective ijtihad validate and revise knowledge? The review argues that contemporary Tarjih is best understood as critical revelational foundationalism combined with spiral epistemic pluralism and institutional validation.

METHOD

The study employed a qualitative conceptual systematic review. The object of analysis was the epistemological architecture expressed across methodological writings, official decisions, and applied fiqh documents rather than the statistical effect of an intervention. The review followed the stages of problem formulation, source identification, relevance screening, data extraction, coding, thematic synthesis, and integrative interpretation recommended for systematic reviews in the social sciences (Tranfield et al., 2003; Snyder, 2019). Thematic synthesis enabled the analysis to move from descriptions of particular concepts to higher-order relationships among sources, approaches, validation criteria, and institutional authority (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

The temporal boundary included works published no later than December 31, 2020. Search terms were used in English and Indonesian, including Manhaj Tarjih, epistemologi Muhammadiyah, Majelis Tarjih, bayani, burhani, irfani, Sunnah al-Maqbulah, fresh ijtihad, maqasid, pertingkatan norma, metode penafsiran Muhammadiyah, hadis daif Muhammadiyah, hisab, fikih kebencanaan, fikih air, and collective ijtihad. Sources were identified through scholarly databases, Indonesian journal portals, university repositories, library catalogues, official Muhammadiyah and Majelis Tarjih channels, and backward citation searching.

A source was included when it was bibliographically traceable, substantively available, published within the temporal boundary, and directly contributed to at least one review question. The final analytical corpus comprised eighteen sources: eight journal articles, four methodological or intellectual books, and six official or institutionally produced decisions and applied fiqh works. General references on systematic-review methodology were not counted as part of the Tarjih corpus. Official publications were treated as evidence of formal institutional positions, not as automatic proof that each component was implemented consistently in every ruling.

The extraction matrix recorded source type, definition of religious knowledge, normative sources, status of interpretation, treatment of madhhab, role of textual language, hadith criteria, use of rationality and causal explanation, use of empirical sciences, interpretation of irfani, function of maqasid, hierarchy of norms, collective validation, authority of decisions, and revision mechanisms. Initial codes included revelational authority, interpretive fallibility, textual control, probabilistic hadith knowledge, causal knowledge, scientific expertise, ethical conscience, epistemic integration, value hierarchy, public interest, collective deliberation, institutional authorization, and tajdid.

Source criticism was applied because the corpus is heterogeneous. Academic articles and books were used to reconstruct arguments and critical debates. Official documents established Muhammadiyah's formal terminology and normative commitments. Applied fiqh works showed how epistemological claims were translated into analyses of disasters, water, calendars, and public safety. No source category was treated as sufficient by itself. The synthesis distinguished normative prescription, scholarly interpretation, and demonstrated application.

The review did not insert numerical search totals because the corpus combined database results, book catalogues, official documents, and citation chaining, and the same text often appeared through multiple digital records. The reported corpus size refers to unique analytical works after bibliographic consolidation. The method provides a transparent conceptual synthesis but does not claim exhaustive coverage of internal meeting papers, unpublished deliberations, or all regional Tarjih discussions.

Table 1. Review protocol and analytical decisions

Component	Operational decision
Review type	Qualitative conceptual systematic review with thematic synthesis
Temporal boundary	Publications issued no later than December 31, 2020
Languages	Indonesian and English
Analytical corpus	18 sources: articles, books, official decisions, and applied fiqh works

Component	Operational decision
Primary focus	Sources of knowledge, validation, epistemic integration, authority, and revision
Evidence distinction	Academic interpretation; formal institutional position; applied reasoning
Principal synthesis	Critical revelational foundationalism, spiral epistemic pluralism, and collective validation
Main limitation	Limited access to complete deliberative dossiers and internal records

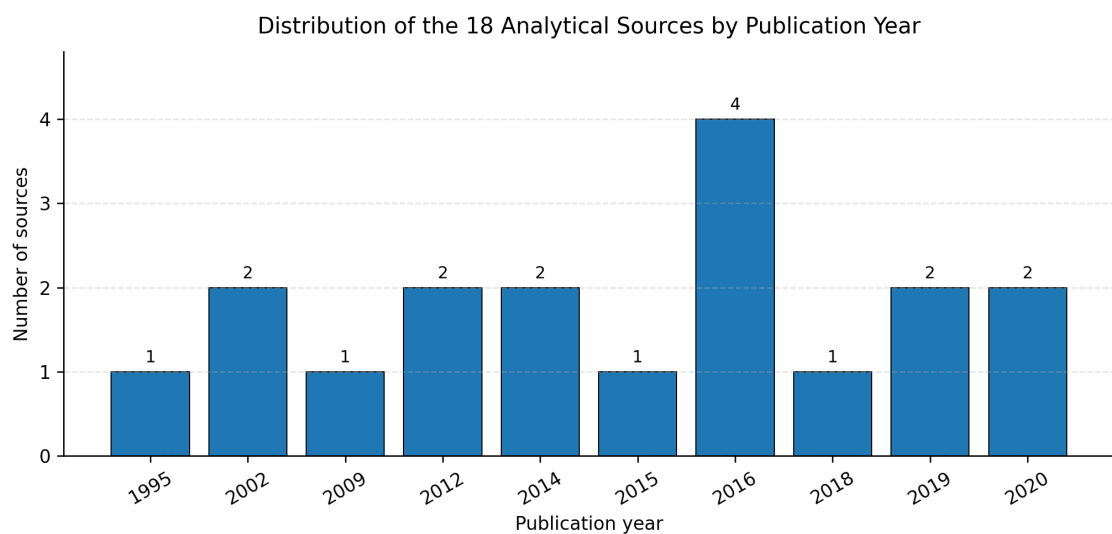


Figure 1. Distribution of the analytical corpus by publication year.

Table 2. Core analytical corpus and epistemological function

Source	Type	Primary epistemological contribution
Djamil (1995)	Book	Ijtihad methods, maqasid, and legal renewal
Abdurrahman (2002)	Book	Systematization of Manhaj Tarjih and non-madhab independence
PP Muhammadiyah (2002)	Official	Bayani-burhani-irfani as an Islamic way of life and thinking
PP Muhammadiyah (2009)	Official	Qur'an, Sunnah, and accumulated Tarjih decisions
Abbas (2012)	Article	Spiral integration of bayani, burhani, and irfani
MTPPI PP Muhammadiyah (2012)	Official	Formal sources, approaches, tajdid, and methodological framework
Aulia (2014)	Article	Qur'anic interpretation and contextual thematic reasoning
Rahmanto (2014)	Article	Probabilistic hadith authority and epistemological critique

Source	Type	Primary epistemological contribution
MTT PP Muhammadiyah (2015)	Applied fiqh	Disaster as theological, scientific, and institutional object
Amri (2016)	Article	Contextual hadith interpretation and astronomical knowledge
Anwar (2016)	Article	Hierarchy of basic values, universal principles, and detailed rules
MTT PP Muhammadiyah (2016)	Applied fiqh	Environmental science, public goods, and value-based norms
Santoso (2016)	Article	Purification, dynamization, and expansion of objects of ijtihad
Anwar (2018)	Article	Integrated architecture of perspectives, sources, approaches, and procedures
Abdullah (2019)	Book	Fresh ijtihad and multidisciplinary-interdisciplinary reasoning
Fariadi (2019)	Article	Maqasid, public law, spirituality, and traffic ethics
Fanani (2020)	Institutional essay	Contemporary interpretation of the three epistemic approaches
Rosyadi (2020)	Article	Sunnah al-Maqbulah and criteria of authoritative prophetic reports

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. From Preference Among Opinions to an Epistemology of Ijtihad

The reviewed literature shows a historical expansion in the object and meaning of tarjih. Early activity concentrated on selecting the stronger view among available juristic opinions. Such comparison required textual evidence, hadith evaluation, and knowledge of classical fiqh, but it remained largely within an inherited field of questions and answers. The establishment of Majelis Tarjih formalized this activity as collective organizational reasoning.

As Muhammadiyah entered education, healthcare, welfare, science, and public policy, the epistemic object changed. Questions were no longer only about which juristic opinion was stronger. The council had to identify new realities, determine their causes and consequences, and formulate norms for situations that classical jurists had not encountered in the same form. Tarjih increasingly meant every disciplined intellectual effort to respond to religious and social problems from an Islamic perspective (Anwar, 2018).

This expansion transformed the conditions of valid knowledge. A question concerning prayer may be reconstructed predominantly through transmitted texts and established ritual practice. A question concerning disaster governance requires geology, public health, psychology, humanitarian coordination, and theology. A question concerning water requires hydrology, environmental law, economics, ownership, and distributive justice. The difference is not a weaker commitment to revelation but a wider account of what must be known before revelation can be applied responsibly.

Santoso (2016) describes a related movement from a narrow understanding of purification toward spiritual and social dynamization. Abdullah (2019) develops the argument through fresh *ijtihad*, insisting that contemporary Islamic reasoning must engage the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. The epistemology of Tarjih is therefore problem-oriented. The method begins not only by asking which text is relevant, but also by asking what kind of object is being judged and what knowledge is required to understand it.

2. Revelation as Normative Horizon and Interpretation as Fallible Knowledge

The first epistemological foundation is the authority of the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah. The official *manhaj* does not position these sources as two items among several equal sources. They define the normative horizon within which religious judgments are justified. *Ijma*, *qiyas*, *maslahah*, *'urf*, scientific findings, and institutional experience perform supporting or interpretive functions; they do not replace revelation as the source of Islamic normativity (Majelis Tarjih dan Pengembangan Pemikiran Islam PP Muhammadiyah, 2012).

Normative primacy does not imply that interpretive conclusions possess the same status as revelation. The literature repeatedly distinguishes religion from religious understanding. The sources are authoritative, but human access to their meaning is mediated through language, historical context, *hadith* transmission, conceptual assumptions, and the interpreter's knowledge of reality. This distinction allows Muhammadiyah to combine fidelity with *tajdid*. A previous decision may be revised when stronger evidence, better knowledge, or changed circumstances reveal limitations in the earlier reasoning.

This structure can be characterized as critical revelational foundationalism. It is foundationalist because revelation supplies the basic normative reference. It is critical because no interpretation, juristic school, organizational decision, or scientific theory is treated as immune from examination. The model differs from rigid textual foundationalism, which collapses revelation into one literal reading, and from unrestricted contextualism, which allows social preference to determine the norm independently of the sources.

Non-affiliation to a single *madhhab* follows from this distinction. Muhammadiyah's institutional independence does not imply that classical juristic knowledge is irrelevant. The arguments, linguistic rules, analogies, maxims, and legal purposes developed within the *madhhabs* remain intellectual resources. What is rejected is compulsory loyalty that prevents reconsideration of evidence. Abdurrahman (2002) and Anwar (2018) show that critical engagement with tradition is a condition of independence, not its opposite.

3. Bayani: Textual Authority, Language, and Probabilistic Transmission

Bayani reasoning supplies the most visible epistemic controls in Manhaj Tarjih. It investigates the wording, structure, context, and interrelationship of Qur'anic and prophetic texts. The approach includes Arabic linguistics, *usul al-fiqh*, Qur'anic interpretation, hadith sciences, and the accumulated reasoning of jurists. Its purpose is not simply to locate a quotation, but to establish what a text can legitimately mean and how multiple texts should be read together.

Aulia (2014) shows that Muhammadiyah's Qur'anic interpretation has developed beyond atomistic citation toward thematic and contextual analysis. A verse may be placed within the structure of a surah, related to other verses, examined through historical circumstances, and connected with contemporary problems. The bayani approach therefore includes both semantic discipline and intertextual comprehensiveness.

The concept of *Sunnah al-Maqbulah* further demonstrates that textual knowledge is probabilistic and critical. Acceptance is not identical to the formal label *sahih* in one chain. The authority of a report may involve the quality and multiplicity of transmission, supporting indicators, content analysis, relationship with the Qur'an and stronger hadith, and consistency with established principles. Rosyadi (2020) explains the expanded category, while Rahmanto (2014) warns that the slogan of returning to accepted *Sunnah* can become apologetic if the epistemological consequences of probability and disagreement are ignored.

Bayani reasoning also manages apparent contradiction. Texts may be reconciled, contextualized, ranked, interpreted as general and specific, or assigned different scopes. When evidence cannot be reconciled, preference or suspension may be required. These procedures indicate that scriptural authority is maintained through disciplined interpretation rather than through the denial of ambiguity.

Its principal risk is textual closure. If the object of a problem is inadequately reconstructed, a formally correct textual argument may be applied to the wrong reality. Bayani knowledge therefore requires the contribution of *burhani* analysis. The text identifies normative meanings, but empirical knowledge determines many of the conditions, causes, and consequences to which those meanings are applied.

4. Burhani: Rational Demonstration, Causality, and Scientific Knowledge

Burhani reasoning is the second major foundation. It gives a constitutive role to reason, causal explanation, empirical observation, and the findings of relevant disciplines. The approach is especially important in *muamalat* and contemporary public problems, where the ruling depends on the nature and effects of actions, technologies, institutions, or natural phenomena. Burhani is not merely the use of common sense; it requires methods appropriate to the object, including scientific measurement, historical analysis, social research, and professional expertise.

The use of astronomical calculation illustrates the epistemic significance of causality and measurement. Muhammadiyah's calendar reasoning does not consider observation and calculation as two equivalent customs. It asks what knowledge astronomy provides about lunar motion, visibility, time zones, and the organization of a reliable calendar. Amri (2016) interprets the classical command to observe the moon in relation to its historical cause and the development of calculative knowledge. The case demonstrates how burhani evidence can transform the understanding of a text without displacing its religious purpose.

Fikih Kebencanaan offers a more complex example. Disaster is interpreted through theological values, but the document also depends on knowledge of hazards, vulnerability, mitigation, emergency response, and recovery. The norm cannot be formulated responsibly if disaster is understood only as punishment or fate. Scientific and institutional knowledge changes the description of responsibility: prevention, preparedness, protection of vulnerable groups, and coordinated response become religiously relevant (Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, 2015).

Fikih Air similarly integrates environmental science, resource governance, ownership, access, conservation, and public welfare. The empirical reality of water scarcity and pollution is not external information added after the ruling. It forms part of the object to which the norm applies. Burhani reasoning thus expands the epistemic community beyond jurists to scientists, engineers, health professionals, economists, and social researchers (Majelis Tarjih dan Tajdid PP Muhammadiyah, 2016).

The risk of burhani reasoning is scientism. Empirical research can describe what occurs, estimate effects, and compare interventions, but it cannot by itself determine the complete religious value of an action. Scientific conclusions are also provisional and may contain methodological uncertainty or institutional bias. Burhani therefore requires bayani normativity and irfani ethical vigilance, as well as transparent assessment of the quality and relevance of expert evidence.

5. Irfani: Ethical-Spiritual Vigilance and the Limits of Intuition

Irfani is the least operationally settled component of the triad. In the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, irfani may refer to knowledge through spiritual unveiling, presence, intuition, or disciplined inner experience. Muhammadiyah's reception is more cautious. The reviewed sources generally reinterpret irfani through ihsan, moral sensitivity, conscience, spiritual purification, humility, and awareness of accountability before God (Abbas, 2012; Fanani, 2020).

This interpretation gives irfani an important but bounded role. It does not normally generate an independently enforceable rule that overrides text and evidence. Instead, it regulates the moral quality of reasoning. A technically sophisticated decision may still be deficient if it ignores suffering, humiliates affected groups, conceals conflicts of interest,

or treats efficiency as the only relevant value. Irfani directs attention to intentions, compassion, integrity, and the ethical experience of persons subject to the ruling.

The approach is particularly relevant to cases where evidence permits several options. Textual and empirical analysis may establish a range of permissible policies, while ethical sensitivity helps identify which option better protects dignity and reduces harm. In this sense, irfani does not compete with bayani and burhani at the same epistemic level. It functions as an ethical-spiritual orientation that shapes problem selection, deliberative conduct, and consequence evaluation.

The weakness is reproducibility. Conscience cannot be inspected in the same manner as a textual citation or scientific dataset. An appeal to intuition may conceal personal preference. The literature does not provide a fully standardized procedure for distinguishing disciplined moral insight from subjective feeling. The most defensible operationalization is therefore intersubjective: irfani claims should be translated into publicly discussable considerations such as dignity, compassion, vulnerability, sincerity, justice, and avoidance of humiliation.

Institutional ethics also belong to this dimension. Deliberators must disclose relevant evidence, listen to affected communities, recognize uncertainty, avoid domination, and remain willing to revise conclusions. Understood this way, irfani is not an esoteric supplement but an ethical discipline of knowledge production.

6. Spiral Integration and the Mediation of Maqasid

The central finding of the synthesis is that the three approaches are intended to operate through spiral epistemic pluralism. Parallel operation would produce separate answers: a textual answer, a scientific answer, and an ethical answer. Linear hierarchy could allow one approach to dominate permanently. The spiral model instead requires each approach to revise the questions and conclusions of the others (Abbas, 2012).

The relationship is not symmetrical in every case. Bayani remains dominant in defining the normative content of ritual worship. Burhani becomes more extensive when the object involves causal, technological, medical, economic, or social complexity. Irfani provides ethical correction throughout the process. The appropriate balance depends on the object, but no approach is expected to proceed without awareness of the others.

Maqasid mediates the movement from plural knowledge to practical judgment. Purposes such as protection of life, religion, intellect, family, property, dignity, justice, and public welfare connect textual norms with the effects identified through burhani analysis. Maqasid does not function as an independent preference detached from revelation. It is reconstructed from the normative system and used to evaluate whether a detailed rule realizes or frustrates its higher purposes.

The hierarchy of norms strengthens this mediation. Anwar (2016) distinguishes basic values, universal principles, and detailed rules. Basic values include justice, mercy, benefit, and human dignity. Universal principles formulate more specific normative directions. Detailed rules address particular conduct. A detailed ruling should be interpretable as an application of higher values and principles. When circumstances change, the detailed rule may require reconsideration while the underlying value remains stable.

This architecture can explain why applied Muhammadiyah fiqh frequently begins with values and general principles before presenting operational guidance. In Fikih Air, stewardship, justice, and shared benefit guide rules concerning access and conservation. In traffic ethics, protection of life and property connects religious responsibility with state law and public safety (Fariadi, 2019). Norm hierarchy prevents isolated rules from becoming detached from the moral system they are intended to serve.

7. Collective Ijtihad as Institutional Epistemic Validation

The final foundation is institutional. Muhammadiyah does not treat a Tarjih judgment solely as the product of an individual scholar. Collective ijtihad brings jurists, Qur'anic and hadith specialists, scientists, professionals, and organizational representatives into deliberation. The form is epistemologically significant because contemporary problems are distributed across disciplines. No individual ordinarily possesses all the knowledge required to reconstruct the object and its normative implications.

Collectivity does not guarantee truth. A meeting can reproduce hierarchy, selective evidence, or consensus pressure. Its epistemic value depends on the quality of participation, the disclosure of arguments, the inclusion of relevant expertise, the management of disagreement, and the opportunity for criticism. Institutional authorization should be distinguished from evidentiary justification: authorization explains why a decision is binding within the organization, while justification explains why the conclusion should be accepted as reasonable.

The literature indicates several levels of organizational product, including formal decisions, fatwas, guidance, and applied fiqh. These products differ in procedure and authority. Greater transparency concerning their evidentiary status would strengthen the epistemology. Readers should be able to identify the question, factual findings, textual corpus, expert evidence, methods, competing views, maqasid analysis, conclusion, degree of certainty, and conditions for revision.

Tajdid supplies a mechanism of epistemic correction. The possibility of revision follows from the fallibility of interpretation and the development of knowledge. A decision may be reconsidered because a hadith assessment changes, scientific knowledge improves, the social object changes, previously ignored harm becomes visible, or a more coherent interpretation is developed. Institutional memory should therefore preserve both decisions and the reasoning that produced them.

The synthesis characterizes this arrangement as epistemic governance. Manhaj Tarjih governs who participates, which evidence is recognized, how knowledge forms are related, how conclusions acquire authority, and how errors can be corrected. Its quality cannot be evaluated only by the final ruling; it must also be evaluated through the transparency and integrity of the process.

Table 3. Epistemological dimensions of contemporary Manhaj Tarjih

Dimension	Primary object/source	Validation criterion	Characteristic risk
Normative foundation	Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah	Coherence with revelation and accepted prophetic authority	Conflating revelation with one interpretation
Bayani	Texts, language, juristic arguments, transmission	Semantic discipline, hadith criticism, intertextual coherence	Textual closure and decontextualization
Burhani	Reason, causality, empirical and social reality	Logical validity, methodological evidence, explanatory adequacy	Scientism or uncritical expert dependence
Irfani	Conscience, spiritual formation, ethical experience	Integrity, compassion, dignity, intersubjective moral scrutiny	Subjectivism and unverifiable intuition
Maqasid and norm hierarchy	Values, universal principles, detailed rules	Consistency between purposes, consequences, and rulings	Purpose-based overextension
Collective validation	Deliberation, multidisciplinary expertise, organizational process	Argument disclosure, relevant participation, authorization, revisability	Institutional closure or consensus pressure

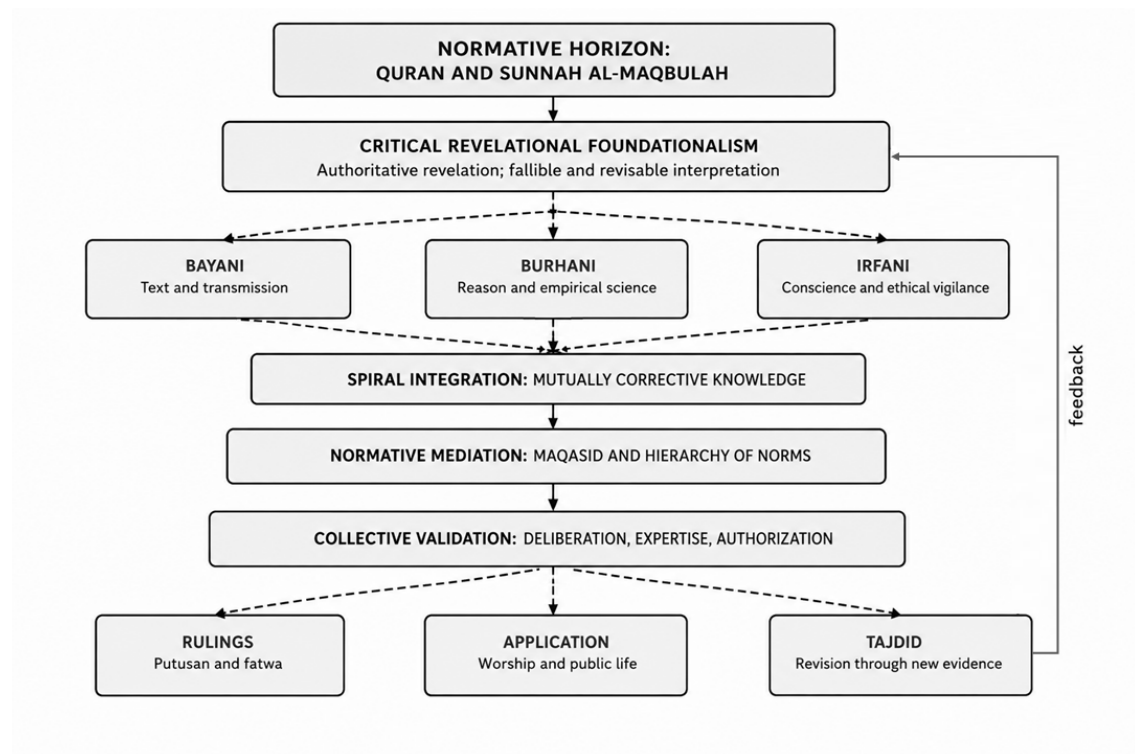


Figure 2. Integrative epistemological architecture of contemporary Manhaj Tarjih.

Discussion

1. Critical Revelational Foundationalism

The first theoretical contribution of the review is the concept of critical revelational foundationalism. Muhammadiyah does not build religious normativity from an unrestricted plurality of sources. The Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah remain foundational. Yet the foundation is not self-interpreting. Meaning is produced through fallible human methods, and the application of meaning depends on knowledge of reality. This dual commitment explains the coexistence of purification and dynamization within Tarjih.

The concept corrects two simplified readings. The first identifies return to scripture with literalism. The second treats contextual reasoning as a departure from scripture. In Manhaj Tarjih, contextual knowledge is required precisely because the norm must be applied to a correctly understood object. Scientific and social evidence do not rival revelation; they prevent revelation from being applied to an imagined reality.

Critical foundationalism also explains revision. If a decision were identical with revelation, revision would appear as doctrinal inconsistency. If decisions are human reconstructions oriented toward revelation, revision becomes an expression of intellectual responsibility. Tajdid is epistemically possible because the foundation remains stable while interpretive and empirical knowledge can improve.

2. Spiral Epistemic Pluralism and Its Asymmetry

The second contribution is spiral epistemic pluralism. The epistemology recognizes several legitimate ways of knowing without treating them as interchangeable. Bayani answers questions of textual meaning and normative transmission. Burhani answers questions of causality, fact, and explanatory relation. Irfani addresses ethical and spiritual quality. Their integration is pluralist because no single mode is sufficient for all objects; it is bounded because revelation and publicly accountable reasoning constrain the range of acceptable claims.

The spiral metaphor is more useful than a simple triangle. It indicates movement and feedback. A scientific finding may require renewed textual interpretation. A textual principle may direct researchers to examine a previously neglected harm. Ethical experience may expose an unjust consequence and lead to a new empirical question. The reasoning process can return to earlier stages rather than proceeding through a one-way sequence.

However, the three approaches are operationally asymmetrical. Bayani has established disciplines and technical vocabularies. Burhani can draw on mature scientific methods. Irfani is formulated more as an orientation than as a replicable procedure. This asymmetry should be acknowledged rather than concealed. The solution is not to remove irfani, but to translate its contribution into public ethical criteria and deliberative practices that can be discussed and criticized.

3. Maqasid as a Bridge, Not a Substitute

The review also clarifies the place of maqasid. Contemporary Islamic legal reasoning sometimes invokes purposes so broadly that they become independent sources of preferred outcomes. Tarjih literature more defensibly positions maqasid as a bridge. Purposes are derived from the normative system, clarified through values and universal principles, and applied to consequences established through empirical analysis.

Norm hierarchy provides protection against both atomism and abstraction. Atomism arises when a detailed text is applied without examining the wider normative system. Abstraction arises when general values such as justice or benefit are invoked without rules of derivation. The movement among basic values, universal principles, and detailed judgments enables mutual control. A practical rule must be connected upward to principle and value, while value must be translated downward through disciplined reasoning.

Applied fiqh documents demonstrate the promise of this architecture but also the need for clearer case documentation. The reader should be able to see precisely how a value was identified, which empirical consequences were considered, and why one practical rule was selected over alternatives. Without that chain, maqasid may function rhetorically rather than analytically.

4. Institutional Epistemology and the Production of Authority

The fourth contribution is to understand Tarjih as institutional epistemology. Knowledge is not produced in an abstract space. Agendas, membership, expertise, meeting procedures, publication, and organizational hierarchy shape the reasoning process. The authority of Majelis Tarjih is legal-rational and collective: decisions are authorized through organizational procedure rather than through allegiance to one charismatic jurist or inherited madhhab.

This form of authority has democratic and epistemic potential. It permits multiple experts to contribute and enables institutional continuity beyond individual scholars. It can also create opacity if the deliberation is not documented. Organizational authority may encourage members to accept conclusions without understanding the arguments. Rahmanto's (2014) criticism of apologetic epistemology is relevant here: confidence in the institution should not replace critical literacy regarding evidence and uncertainty.

The strongest form of institutional authority is therefore transparent and revisable. A decision should communicate not only what Muhammadiyah concludes, but also how the problem was defined, which evidence was admitted, how disciplines interacted, what disagreement remained, and why revision might later become necessary. Institutional legitimacy and epistemic justification are mutually reinforcing when both are visible.

5. Epistemological Tensions

Four tensions recur across the corpus. The first is between scriptural authority and interpretive fallibility. The second is between scientific expertise and normative judgment. The third is between ethical conscience and public verifiability. The fourth is between collective authority and critical openness. These tensions are constitutive rather than accidental; eliminating one side would weaken the system.

Manhaj Tarjih manages the tensions through differentiation and integration. Revelation is distinguished from interpretation. Facts are distinguished from values. Conscience is distinguished from private preference. Organizational authorization is distinguished from evidentiary justification. Integration then reconnects the differentiated elements in a complete judgment. Methodological weakness appears when the distinction is ignored or the integration is merely asserted.

The practical test is case transparency. A reader should be able to trace how the text, empirical facts, ethical considerations, maqasid, and institutional process contributed to the conclusion. The formal declaration of bayani-burhani-irfani integration is not sufficient if the reasoning dossier remains inaccessible.

Table 4. Recurrent tensions, epistemic safeguards, and research priorities

Tension	Required safeguard	Priority for future research
Revelation vs. interpretation	Explicit distinction between source authority and fallible conclusion	Trace changes in rulings and their evidentiary triggers
Text vs. reality	Interdisciplinary reconstruction of the legal object	Compare the use of expert evidence across cases
Science vs. normativity	Quality appraisal and clear separation of factual and normative claims	Develop protocols for scientific uncertainty
Irfani vs. subjectivity	Translate conscience into discussable ethical criteria	Operationalize dignity, vulnerability, and compassion
Maqasid vs. overextension	Document derivation from values to principles to detailed rules	Audit the hierarchy of norms in applied fiqh
Collective authority vs. closure	Publish deliberative evidence, dissent, and review conditions	Study meeting records and institutional power relations

Conceptual Propositions

The synthesis generates four conceptual propositions. They are analytical statements intended to guide future case-based and comparative research rather than statistical hypotheses tested by the present review.

Proposition 1. Tarjih judgments achieve stronger epistemic legitimacy when revelational authority is clearly distinguished from the fallible interpretive reasoning through which that authority is applied.

Proposition 2. Bayani and burhani reasoning become mutually corrective when empirical knowledge reconstructs the object of judgment while textual reasoning defines the normative criteria by which that object is evaluated.

Proposition 3. Irfani contributes most defensibly when it is operationalized as publicly discussable ethical vigilance and deliberative integrity rather than as an autonomous source of unverifiable legal conclusions.

Proposition 4. Collective ijtihad improves knowledge only when multidisciplinary participation, argument disclosure, dissent management, and revision mechanisms materially affect the decision process.

Implications for Muhammadiyah and Islamic Legal Studies

For Majelis Tarjih, the principal implication is the need for an epistemic disclosure template. Major decisions should identify the normative sources, status of relevant hadith, textual methods, factual findings, scientific experts, uncertainty, ethical considerations, maqasid, competing arguments, organizational procedure, and conditions for review. This would transform the abstract manhaj into a visible chain of reasoning.

For Tarjih education, bayani, burhani, and irfani should not be taught as three definitions to be memorized. Students should analyze the same case through each approach, identify conflicts among them, and construct an integrated conclusion. Training in philosophy of science, evidence appraisal, research ethics, and deliberation is necessary alongside *usul al-fiqh* and hadith studies.

For Muhammadiyah universities and professional institutions, the model provides a basis for organized collaboration with Majelis Tarjih. Scientific experts should not be invited only after jurists have framed the problem. They should contribute to defining the object, identifying evidence, and assessing consequences. Communities affected by a decision should also be included where experiential knowledge is relevant.

For Islamic legal studies, contemporary Manhaj Tarjih offers a case of organizational jurisprudence that can be compared with Nahdlatul Ulama's *bahtsul masail*, Persis's Dewan Hisbah, the Indonesian Ulama Council, and international *fiqh* academies. Comparative research should examine epistemic sources, expertise, dissent, authority, and revision rather than comparing only final rulings.

Limitations and Future Research

The review is limited by the availability of deliberative records. Formal documents describe the intended epistemology, while published articles and applied *fiqh* works reveal selected aspects of implementation. They do not provide complete transcripts of how evidence was weighted in national deliberations. The synthesis therefore reconstructs epistemological architecture rather than claiming to reproduce every internal decision process.

The corpus is limited to Indonesian- and English-language works issued up to 2020. It excludes later revisions and emerging debates. Future studies should conduct process tracing of specific rulings, compare draft and final texts, interview participants from different disciplines, and examine cases in which decisions changed. A searchable digital corpus containing citations, evidence types, expert contributions, dissent, and revision history would make methodological consistency empirically testable.

CONCLUSION

This conceptual systematic review shows that the epistemological foundations of contemporary Manhaj Tarjih extend beyond the technical selection of stronger legal proofs. The system begins with the Qur'an and Sunnah al-Maqbulah as the normative horizon, but it treats interpretation as a fallible intellectual activity subject to *tajdid*. Bayani reasoning supplies textual and transmission controls; burhani reasoning reconstructs causal and empirical reality; and irfani reasoning provides ethical-spiritual vigilance. Maqasid and norm hierarchy connect these forms of knowledge with practical judgments, while collective *ijtihad* gives the process institutional continuity and authority.

The resulting architecture is best characterized as critical revelational foundationalism

and spiral epistemic pluralism. Its strength lies in refusing both closed textualism and unrestricted contextualism. Revelation remains authoritative, but responsible application requires science, social analysis, conscience, and organizational deliberation. Its principal weakness is not the absence of epistemic resources, but uneven operationalization and insufficient transparency regarding how the resources are combined in particular cases. A stronger contemporary Tarjih epistemology therefore requires explicit separation of factual and normative claims, rigorous appraisal of expert evidence, publicly discussable ethical criteria, documented maqasid reasoning, disclosure of disagreement, and institutional mechanisms of revision. Under these conditions, Manhaj Tarjih can function as a form of epistemic governance capable of producing Islamic guidance that is scripturally grounded, scientifically informed, ethically sensitive, and critically accountable.

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