

# Muslim scholar's discourse on Buddhism: a literature on Buddha's position

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**Abstract.** The coexistence of Islam and Buddhism relation took place in the middle of the 8th century. Although both religions originated from different sources, Muslims scholars were the first to study about Buddhism. Inspired by selected verses in the Quran, Muslims scholars recognized an element of similarity of Buddha's teaching with Islamic teaching. This paper examines the views of Muslim scholars on Buddha's position in the Islamic tradition in early and contemporarily literature. The method of this study is qualitative by emphasizing on contain analysis using three research design: philological, historical, and theological. Among the early Muslim scholars discussed in this paper are al-Baladhuri (d. 892), al-Biruni (973-1048 AD), Ibn al-Nadim (995 AD), al-Shahrastani (1086-1153 AD), al-Tabarī (838-923 AD), al-Hamadhani (1247-1318 AD), and the contemporary Muslim scholars is Muhammad Hamidullah (1908-2002), Hamid Abdul Qadir (1957), Hamza Yusuf (1958 –), Shah Reza Kazemi (1960 –), and Imtiyaz Yusuf. The study suggests the position of Buddha as a prophet in the Islamic tradition are justified based on selected terms in the Quran like *tīn*, *Dhu al-Kifl* and *Ṣābi'īn*. This paper concludes that there is a strong relation between Islam and Buddhism in early Islamic literature.

## 1 Introduction

Islam is a religion that recognizes the existence of various religions in the world. In the Quran, Allah s.w.t. states the names of world religions such as “Islam, the Jews, the Sabians, the Christians, the Magians, and the polytheists” (22:17). There are religions that are not clearly mentioned in the Quran as Buddhism, although those religions existed thousands of years earlier before the birth of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) Apart from the name of the religion, the Qur'an also classifies the people into three categories, namely *Ahl*

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*al-Tawhīd* (the people of Monotheism), which refers to a people who believed in the oneness of Allah s.w.t. and all prophets as His messenger; *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book), which refers to the Jews and Christians, who are possessors of divine books, as distinguished to the People of Dubious from those whose religions are not based on divine revelations such as Zoroastrianism and pagans. Although each religion has its own theological and ritual system, the interaction between the believers is harmonious as demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his series of dialogues especially with the *Ahl al-Kitāb* like the Jews and the Christians. The initial approach of interaction that is fully guided by the Qur'an and Hadith is manifested verbally and in writing, together with the good example - *qudwah al-ḥasanah*. In the 7th century, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), effort to convey the teachings of Islam was continued by the Companions and the Caliphs through expeditions to expand the Islamic empire that includes the Central Asian regions. Previously the interaction only involves the religions mentioned in the Quran, while the expansion of the Islamic empire in the Persian East, Transoxiana, Afghanistan and Sindh areas opens a new avenue through interaction with the Buddhists. Due to the lack of information about Buddhism, there are polemic among Muslims in determining Buddhist's position according to the Islamic jurisprudence, that is, whether to consider them same as the *dhimmi* like the People of the Book and vice versa. This has led to the in-depth study of scholars on Buddhist origins, doctrines and rituals of Buddhism based on historical and theological view in the form of narrative and comparative discourses.

## 2 Literature Review

The literature on Buddhism among early Muslim scholars is limited, due to the lack of a fundamental discussion in the major sources of Islam, the Quran and the Hadith. For example, the Quran only states about the six main religions, namely Islam, the Jews, the Christians, the Sabean, the Magians, and the polytheists (22:17) without mentioning any term concerning the Buddha, foremost in the early Quran exegesis as Ibn Abi Hatim (811-890 M) and al-Ṭabarī (838-923 AD). However, the implications of the power expansion policy of the seventh and eighth centuries, beginning in the Umayyad (661-684 AD) expansion to the Central Asia region, interaction with the Buddhist had occurred. In the early stages, Buddhists were categorized as People of the Book, and was subsequently considered as the People of the *Dhimmi* after reviewed by the caliph. Starting from the foundation that had been built in the early period, the Muslims-Buddhism interaction grew during the Abbasid (775-809 AD) period, foremost in intellectual aspects. Subsequently, the integration in civilization, science and culture between the Arab-Persian world, Central Asian and Western worlds was established through the translation works in various fields, for example in astronomy, mathematics and medicine. On the other hand, the Caliph also offered a special position to Indian scholars including Buddhist scientists to serve in Baghdad to develop the Baitul Hikmah as a distinguished scholarly institution. Its significance was continued through the initiative initiated by the Caliph al-Mansur (754-775 AD) and was continued by the caliph of Harun al-Rashid (786-809 AD), and thus recorded the first theological dialogue of Muslim-Buddhist (Elverskog, 2010). This scenario then inspired the writing of Buddhism through the work of *Bilawhar wa Budhasaf* by Abban al-Lahiki (750-815 AD), a leading poet in Baghdad. The work produced in Persian was later translated into Sanskrit, Arabic and other languages (Gibb, 1986). Another successful work is the *Book al-Budd* which is also translated from Sanskrit to Arabic and subsequently became the main reference in the study of Buddhism (Imtiyaz Yusuf, 2010).

The study of Buddhism during the period of Harun al-Rashid (786-809 AD) was increasingly gaining attention when the Caliph appointed the Barmakid family, that is Yahya bin Barmak, to hold important positions in the government administration. The Barmakid family, originated from Balkh, South Afghanistan held high positions in the Nava Vihara Temple, a Buddhist Center. Yahya bin Barmak (806 AD), the grandson of the Monk leader was also a tutor to Caliph Harun al-Rashid (Azad, 2017; Bladel, 2011; Berzin, 2010; Imtiyaz Yusuf, 2007; Sachau, 1910). In that position, he sent several of his officers to India to explore the ancient knowledge in medical (Levinson & Christensen 2002) as well as the religions that existed in India, including the Buddhas who had once been the religion of theirs. Yahya bin Barmak leads the translation of Sanskrit works and protects sources proving the Buddha's life (Azad 2017 & Bladel 2011), and even most of his early Arab and Persian literature sources were referred to by later Islamic scientists such as Ibn Khurradadbih (820-912 AD), al-Maqdisi (946-991 AD), al-Mawarzi (770-874 AD), Gardizi (1061) and al-Shahrastani (1086-1153 AD).

While in the ninth century, in the early stages, Muslim scholars focused on historical narratives (al-Baladhuri 1987; al-Maqdisi, 2004, al-Mas'udi, 1841, al-Ṭabarī, 1991) without discussing the character of the Buddha as Prophet. From the theological aspect, the debate is limited to the result of the advent of Islamic scientists to the inhabited areas of the Buddha, giving certain characteristics to the worship houses, worshipers, and adherents of Buddhism (al-Maqdisi, 2004, al-Ṭabarī, 1991, al-Baladhuri, 1987) and there is an element of confusion when the character of God the Buddha is likened to the Lord of Hinduism (al-Maqdisi, 2004). Only in the tenth century, Islamic scientists raised talks about the position of the Prophet for instance under the topic of *Ashab Madhāhib al-Hind* by referring to the term *al-budd* to the character of *Budhasaf/Yudhasaf* (Ibn al-Nadim 2014, al-Biruni's 2008, al-Mas'udi 1841) or a Prophet (al-Shahrastani, 1992 & Sachau, 1910). The al-Biruni's account of India is more focused on Hinduism, and it is difficult to find Buddhism's debate (Sachau, 1910). This was justified by Sachau (1910) that al-Biruni did not know much about Buddhism because his writing was theoretical and never arrived in India. This impression is not true because there are many records of al-Biruni's visit to the Buddhist community including India. For example, when Mahmud Ghazni dominates Bukhara, al-Biruni has spent his life serving him and his son, Mas'ud. The domination of South India by Mahmud Ghazni succeeded with the help of al-Biruni (Sparavigna, 2013; Bigelow, 2013; Berzin, 2008). Moreover, al-Biruni (2008) in his work *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah min al-Qarūn al-Khāliyah*, does mentioned the character of *Yudhasaf* with the Sabean religion which later supported by Tabrizi (2012) and Tabataba'i (1997) as the Buddhism in the Quran.

Regarding Buddhism, al-Biruni in the *Book of al-Hind* explains the basis of Buddhist traditions and beliefs, as well as the perception of the Buddhist community as a Prophet. Nevertheless, it does not mean that he proposes to the Muslims to recognize the position of Buddha as Prophet, but he understands that Buddhists do not consider Shakyamuni's character as God (Berzin, 2008). The al-Biruni's legation was further developed by al-Shahrastani (1086-1153 AD) who also visited India in the eleven and twelve centuries, regarding Buddhism's standing in India (Berzin, 1994).

Entering the 13th century, the Mongols' attack on Baghdad led to the destruction of the Muslims Scholar's works on Buddhism, which were either burned or partly thrown into the Tigris river until the ink transform the river's water into black color. The implications paralyzed the Islamic world which was centered in Baghdad. The only surviving work that brings together a significant number of important Islamic-Buddhist relation in the Central Asian region is *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh's* by Rashid al-Din al-Hamadhani (1247-1318 M). The work of Rashid al-Din al-Hamadhani on Buddhism derived from Buddhist material from Kashmiri Buddhist monk (bakhshī) Kamāla Śrī, besides from Central Asian Buddhism

(Jackson, 2017 & Canby, 1993). Perhaps the last was by Ibn Battuta (1304-1369), but works on Buddhism or the Buddhist position were no longer discussed among Muslims traditions until the twentieth century, where Muslims scholars from Central Asia like Muhammad Hamidullah (1908-2002) and Hamid Abdul Qadir (1957) started to stress the theme in their works. The same premise was later followed by other prominent Muslim scholars like Hamza Yusuf (1958 –), Shah Reza Kazemi (1960 –) and Imtiyaz Yusuf who discussed the significant relation of Muslim-Buddhist relations in contemporary world. Discussions among prominent Muslim scholars like Imtiyaz were supported by philological arguments, instead of theology and history. However, the premise is open to debate due to lack of support from early Muslims *mufasssirin* (exegesis) on the selected terms in the Quran which is *tīn*, *Dhu al-Kifl* and *Ṣābi'in* (Sabean). However, this argument was supported by prominent Muslims *mufasssirin* (exegesis) al-Qasimi (d. 1914) and Tabataba'i (d. 1981) regarding the Buddha as one of the prophets.

### 3 Result and Discussion

The Muslim scholars' discourse on Buddha position was analysed from three arguments; *first*, philology; *second*, historical; *third*, theological. The philology argument refers to the special terms in the Quran that refers to the Buddha indirectly like the other Prophets – Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, etc., while the historical argument is based on the early narrative on Buddhism by focusing on the general concept of prophet, while on the theological, the argument stress on the similarity element of Buddhism with Islamic teaching.

#### 3.1 Philological Argument

In terms of philology, it is based on three verses in the Holy Quran, the first two verses refer Siddhartha as the prophet Dhu al-Kifl:

[85-85: الأنبياء: ٨٥] وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِدْرِيسَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ كُلٌّ مِّنَ الصَّابِرِينَ

“And (mention) Ishmael, and Idris, and Dhu al-Kifl. All were of the steadfast.” (85)  
[Quran al-Anbiyā' 21: 85]

[48-48: ص: ٤٨] وَادَّكُرَ إِسْمَاعِيلَ وَالْيَسَعَ وَذَا الْكِفْلِ وَكُلٌّ مِّنَ الْأَخْيَارِ

“And make mention of Ishmael and Elisha and Dhu al-Kifl. All are of the chosen” (48)  
[Quran Ṣad 38: 48]

As a guide to all mankind, the Quran describes the Prophets, either directly or indirectly. There are 24,000 of prophets sent by Allah to all mankind, and only 25 of them were selected as an apostle, while five of them were selected as the *ulul azmi* – the higher ranking of apostle. Among the apostle is prophet Dhu al-Kifl as stated in two verses above. The history of prophets Dhu al-Kifl is not discussed in many Islamic narrations. With regards to the founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama, Muslims scholar like Muhammad Hamidullah (1974) and Hamid Abdul Qadir (1957) stated that the Buddha was Prophet Dhu al-Kifl in the Qur'an. Justification for this was made based on the word *kifli*, which means 'someone from Kifli'. The word of *kifl* is Arabicized from the *Kapila* phrase, is the short name for Kapilavastu. Kapilavastu is the birthplace of the Buddha, hence it is named by

Dhu al-Kifl (Berzin, 1994; Imtiyaz Yusuf, 2013; Obuse, 2010; Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 2010).

Instead the terms of *kifl*, the word of *tīn* was regarded by Muhammad Hamidullah and supported by Hamza Yusuf (2010), Reza Kazemi (2010), Imtiyaz Yusuf (2003), al-Qasimi (2002) as a Bodhi tree where the Siddhartha mediated and attained the enlightenment (*nirvana*). Thus, only Gautama Buddha is the only closest figure in the Quran with the fig (*tīn*) tree. Allah said in the Holy Quran:

وَالَّتَيْنِ وَالزَّيْتُونَ ١ وَطُورِ سِينِينَ ٢ وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ ٣ [التين: 1-3]

“I swear by the fig and the olive (1), And mount Sinai (2), And this city made secure (3)”  
[Quran al-Tīn 95: 1-3]

The four symbols in the surah at-Tīn are ironically symbolic to the Prophet. Muslim scholars have different views on the *tīn* (fig) while they agreed with other terms such as *al-Zaytūn* as a symbol of Jerusalem the birthplace of the Prophet Isa., *Sinīn* (Mount Thursina) as a symbol for the place of Moses a.s., and *al-Balad al-Amīn* is symbolized as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Early Muslims Exegesis scholars in the like of Ibn Abi Hatim (811-890 M) quotes the view of Qatadah that the *tīn* is the name of a hill in Damascus, the blessed hill in Sham and contained a tree, while Muhammad bin Ka’ab interpreted the *tīn* as the Companions of the Cave (*Ashabul Kahfi*) as Al-Qurtubi. Ibn Abbas and Mujahid hold same view by regarding it as a fruit that is ate by people (Ibn Abi Hatim, 1997), later followed by al-Tabari (2001), Ibn Kathir (2000) and Abdul Razzaq (1999) quoted Ibn Abbas views, it is a mosque built by Noah on the Mount of Judi besides repeating the al-Qurtubi’s view.

If observed, Muslims *mufasssirin* differ in their views on the true meaning of the word *tīn*. Some interpret it as a fruit (Ibn Abbas and Mujahid), while some interpret it symbolical to some places (Qatadah & Muhammad bin Ka’ab). However, by using philological argument, Imtiyaz Yusuf (2017) suggests the precise interpretation is symbolical for a place in the Middle East. Using scientific argument, Imtiyaz Yusuf (2017) suggests the *tīn* (*ficus religiose*) refers to the Bodhi tree, due to the tree growing much in the Indian subcontinent and in Indo-China rather in the Middle east. Contrarily, the species of the Bodhi tree is from the *ficus carica*, not *ficus religiose* which only grows in the Middle East and West Asia. But the argument can be accepted since both are originated from the same family of *Moraceae*. Moreover, the Bodhi tree also known with seven names in Sanskrit tradition as *Patala* (*Bignonia*), *Pundrika* (*Lotus*), *Sala* (*Shoria Rabusta*), *Saresha* (*Accaciassirisa*), *Udambra*, *Nyagrodha*, and *Asvatha* (*ficus religiousa*). On the other hand, the Buddhist scholars define the Bodhi tree with different species like Dragon Flower tree, Champac tree, Dragon tree, Kesser Dragon tree, and Iron wood tree. In fact, not just in Buddhism, the species of *ficus religiose* is also considered as a sacred tree in the texts of Hindu and Jain, as in the Bhagavad Gita (Abdul Haq Vidyarthi & Abdul Ahad Dawud 2013). The claim to regard Buddha as a prophet, eventually recognized by contemporary Muslims *mufasssirin* as one of the views (Al-Qasimi, 2002).

The Bodhi tree that related with Siddhartha’s history, on the other hand, was compared by H.O.K Rahmat (1984) with the story of Prophet Moses during receiving revelation. When Siddhartha was under the Bodhi tree, he decided not to move until he had the great truth and knowledge. For forty-nine days he meditated and eventually the 'light' came to him. While Moses was mentioned in the Qur’an (Tāha 20: 9-13): "And has come to you the story of Moses. When he saw the fire then said to his family: Wait! I have seen fire, may I bring you a flame from it, or I can guide you from it. When he came to him, he was summoned: O Moses! Behold, I am your Lord, open your two shoes, indeed you are now in

the valley of *Tuwa*; and I have chosen you, then consider what is revealed”. So the ‘light’ for Siddhartha also can be symbolized as a ‘fire’ to Prophet Moses.

### 3.2 Historical Argument

From the historical points of view, al-Maqdisi (1907), divided the Buddhists into two categories, which one of it believed the Buddha is a prophet charged with a mission, and others believed he is divine incarnation. While a Muslim religious scholar and historian, al-Ṭabarī (839–923 CE), prefers not to involve with the polemic, instead describing what he experienced in general. He reported that Buddhist idols were brought from Kabul, Afghanistan to Baghdad in the ninth century. It is also reported that Buddhist idols were sold in Buddhist temple next to the Makh mosque in the market of the city of Bukhara in present Uzbekistan (Imtiyaz Yusuf 2007). Parallel with al-Maqdisi, for the Persian historian, al-Biruni wrote a book about India (*Kitab al-Hind*) and described the basic Buddhist customs and beliefs and noted that the Indians regarded Buddha as a prophet. Similarly, on his work *al-Āthār al-Bāqiyah min al-Qarūn al-Khāliyah*, al-Biruni (2008) did mentioned the Buddha as among the pseudo-prophet who came forward in India after the 1st year of Tahirid. He introduced the Persian writing and called people to the religion of the Sabians.

However, for Berzin (2008), that does not mean, of course, that he was suggesting that Muslims accept Buddha as a prophet of Allah, but it does indicate that he understood that Buddhists do not assert Shakyamuni as their God. The works of al-Biruni on Buddhism was repeated by Ibn Nadim (2014), in *al-Fihrist*. He delineates the different scholarly views of the Buddha, some believed he was the divine incarnate, some believed he was the Apostle from the kind of Angels, some believed he was the *Ifrit* (kind of jinn), while others believed him as an apostle from God in the form of human race. Ibn al-Nadim then stated:

These people [Buddhists of Khurasan] are the most generous of all the inhabitants of the earth and of all the religionists. This is because their prophet Budhasaf [Bodhisattva] has taught them that the greatest sin, which should never be thought of or committed, is the utterance of “No.” Hence they act upon this advice; they regard the uttering of “No” as an act of Satan. And it is their very religion to banish Satan.

By 12th century, al-Shahrastani also repeated al-Biruni’s account of Buddhism in his book entitled *The Book of Religions and Creeds (Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal)*. Al-Shahrastani (1992) placed the Buddha’s position as Prophet Khidir which can be summarized as follows:

Buddha was an ideal human. He was not born, did not get old, and even did not die. He avoided the pleasure of eating, drinking and remained celibate all his life. He was a perfect ascetic and an exemplary model for his disciples. Accordingly, a Buddhist can be defined as a seeker of truth, a practitioner of various ascetic works, and a holder of the deepest sense of inner morality. Buddhist ethical practices include having patience, giving alms, renouncing this world, abstaining from greed and worldly pleasure, and showing compassion for all creatures. Thus, a Buddhist is required to live an ethically correct life. In addition to practicing these ascetic disciplines, a Buddhist is encouraged to pursue spiritual perfection. He must enhance his intelligence and seek a higher existence. By doing so, he can liberate himself from this lower world that is destined to decline, live in the eternal world, and eventually be led to the presence of divine beings. Buddhism places importance on ascetic disciplines and spiritual endeavor. At the end of this description, Shahrastani states that Buddha in the Buddhist context can be compared to Khaḍir (Khidr), a legendary Islamic saint whose existence is taken for granted by Muslims.

Thus, from historical argument, Muslim scholars have different views on Buddha. al-Maqdisi, al-Biruni and Ibn Nadim agree with the position of Buddha as a prophet, without naming it, while al-Ṭabarī did not discuss it except gave some general narratives on Buddhism. Only al-Shahrastani begins to compare it to the prophet Khaḍir (Khidr).

However, the timeline of Khadir that exist at the same period of Moses (d. 1407 BCE) contradicts to the period of Siddhartha (480 – 400 BCE) which exist thousand years earlier. Since there is no established view of his identity, Muslim scholars, mostly those with a South Asian background, like Muhammad Hamidullah (1974) followed by Hamid Abdul Qadir (1957) regards the Buddha as a prophet named Dhu al-Kifl. However, the character of Dhu al-Kifl was identified by some scholars with Ezekiel (622-570 BCE), born at Babylon that existed around hundred years before Siddhartha. The character of Ezekiel is an important figure in Abrahamic Faith – Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Hence, according to the history timeline, Dhu al-Kifl if referred to the prophet Ezekiel nor the Khaḍir was contradict. The only justification by 21st century Muslim scholars like Hamza Yusuf, Shah Reza Kazemi, and Imtiyaz Yusuf on characterization of Dhu al-Kifl with Siddhartha as prophets was based on the premise ‘the unmentioned name of prophets in the Quran.’ In this regard, the unmentioned name of Buddha in the Quran does not deny the existence of other verses that stated him indirectly. It is known that the number of the Prophets is 124,000 while the messengers are known to be 25. To strengthen the position of Buddha as Prophet, Reza Shah Kazemi (2010) outlines six premises based on the verses of the Quran; *First*, every community has a special Messenger (Quran 10:47); *secondly*, there are names of Prophets and messengers that are not narrated (Quran 4: 164); *thirdly*, the existence of religious and Sharia rules for every people (Quran 5:48); *fourth*, every messenger who was pronounced in the language of their people (Quran 14: 4); *fifth*, every prophet who was sent was revealed to reveal the teachings of Tawhid (Quran 21:25); the sixth, the challenge faced by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), exactly the challenge of the previous Prophet (Quran 41:43). So, these premises justify the position of the Buddha as a Prophet.

### 3.3 Theological Argument

The debate that described Buddha as a Prophet brought the teaching of tawhid backed up with the existence of several elements in parallel with the teachings of Islam. *Firstly*, the doctrine of God; *secondly*, universal values; *thirdly*, spiritual wisdom. For the doctrine of God, Muslim scholars have different view with regards the Buddhism’s doctrine, whether as non-theistic or theistic. For al-Baladhuri, al-Ṭabarī, al-Maqdisi, they described Buddha’s with theistic, which is apart from Islamic teaching. The same goes to al-Biruni, followed by al-Sharastani, that Buddhists have their own concept of idolatry and not worshipping Allah. However, for the twentieth century Muslims scholars, by supporting the idea of Buddha as a prophet, the Islamic worldview on Buddhism are open to debate. Like other prophets, it was Buddha’s mission to correct the religious inclination of his time, otherwise the tradition subsequently became corrupted (Obuse 2010; Abul Kalam Azad 1981).

While justifying the Buddhism as non-theistic religion, Imran Nazar Hosein (1976) asserts, it is the original teaching of Buddha, and in the Hinayana sect, there is no God. However, this does not connote atheism (denial of existence of God), rather it affirms the existence of any Deity. Apparently, Buddha was once asked by a disciple whether God existed. He refused to reply. When pressed, he remarked to the effect that if you are suffering from a stomach ache, would you be concerned with the relief of the pain or with studying the prescription of the physician. “It is not my business or yours to find out whether there is a God – our business is to remove the suffering of the world. Hence, by providing the doctrine of Dhamma or the ‘Impersonal Law’, in place of God.

For Reza Kazemi (2010), he agrees with the non-theistic of Buddha’s doctrine. In other words, it shows there is no Personal divinity playing the role of Creator, Revealer, Judge in Buddhism. But to assert that the Buddha’s doctrine is ‘atheistic’ would be to attribute to him an explicit denial and negation of the Absolute—which one does not find

anywhere in his teachings. Even regarded as non-theistic, the concept is close to the concept of *shūnya* (denial) in the Buddha and *shahādah* (testimony) in Islam. The concept of *shūnya* (denial) in Buddhism denies the existence of God, while the concept of *shahādah* (testimony) in Islam contains the pronouncement of denial (*la ilāh*) and pronouncement of confirmation (but Allah). The word rash is by denying the existence of God, in the sense that no God exists. Then followed by the word by affirming that only God is the only God who exists. Hence the disclaimer of the Buddha's teachings to the existence of God is exactly the first pronouncement in *shahādah* (testimony) of Islam (Imtiyaz Yusuf, 2003 & Reza Shah Kazemi, 2010). For the universal values that promoted by Islam-Buddhist, Hamza Yusuf (2010) suggests; Islam is based on six pillars of Faith and its five pillars of Islam, while the Buddha is subject to the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Paths. Both teachings also share the value of kindness, patience and love as the core of human nature. Whereas in terms of spiritual wisdom as asceticism, Buddhist teachings use the term *anicca* while Islam applies the terms of *Zuhd*. *Anicca* as in the Buddha refers to something that is immortal which becomes a barrier to one's to see the true nature of the world. Parallel with Islam, life in the world (*al-hayāt al-dunyā*) is not eternal life (Reza Shah Kazemi, 2010). Thus, in the concept of *zuhd*, one separates itself from worldly things, in the sense that life in the hereafter is eternal. Both terms though have different concepts but share same connotations (Imtiyaz Yusuf, 2003 & Reza Shah Kazemi, 2010).

Ironically, the theological arguments regarding the position of Buddha is more complex than the philology and historical arguments. Furthermore, there are three main schools in Buddhism – Theravada, Mahayana, Hinayana which originated from different background and have different concepts of theology. However, by relating the theological concept in Islam teaching with general doctrine in Buddhism like *sunya* with *shahādah* and *anicca* with *zuhd*, indirectly it can consider as coming from the same source which is from the divine. In short, the three of arguments – philology, historical and theological can be summarize as followed:

**Table 1** Type of arguments on Buddha's position

| Phase (Century) | Muslim Scholars                 | Views of Buddha as Prophet |            |             |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|------------|-------------|
|                 |                                 | Philological               | Historical | Theological |
| 9th             | al-Tabarī (838-923 AD)          |                            | X          |             |
|                 | al-Maqdisi (974 AD)             |                            | X          | X           |
|                 | al-Baladhuri (m.892)            |                            | X          | X           |
| 10th            | al-Biruni (973-1048 AD)         |                            | X          | X           |
|                 | Ibn al-Nadim (995 AD)           |                            | X          | X           |
| 11th            | al-Shahrastani (1086-1153 AD)   |                            | X          | X           |
| 13th            | al-Hamadani (1247-1318 AD)      | X                          | X          | X           |
| 20th            | Al-Qasimi (1866-1914)           | X                          | X          | X           |
|                 | Muhammad Hamidullah (1908-2002) | X                          | X          | X           |
|                 | Imran Nazar Hosein (1942 –)     |                            | X          | X           |
|                 | Hamid Abdul Qadir (1957)        | X                          | X          | X           |
|                 | Hamza Yusuf (1958 –)            |                            | X          | X           |
|                 | Shah Reza Kazemi (1960 –)       |                            | X          | X           |
|                 | Imtiyaz Yusuf (1900s)           | X                          | X          | X           |

## 4 Conclusion

In Islamic teaching, the religion of tawhid begins with the sending of Adam and followed by hundred thousand of prophets and messengers. Either named or characterized with a

figure, vis versa, Muslims need to believe on their prophethood as to bring mankind to the truth. The Quran states, every nation has their own prophet, thus Muslims believe no nation will be abandoned without a prophet or messenger to guide them. As Islam is a propagation religion, Muslims need to deliver the message to all mankind. Furthermore, the Quran has classified religion into three categories – Islam, the people of book, and the people of dubious. The Quran also refutes the false doctrine of other religions to call them to the truth. Until the seventh century, by the expansion of Muslims empire to a region that was dominated by unmentioned religion like Buddhism, Muslims starts to learn about it, however with limited sources. From the ninth to eleventh century, Muslims scholars agree to the position of Buddha as a prophet, from theological and historical argument. These arguments include the refutation and criticism on the Buddhist doctrine which are apart from Islamic teaching. While, from the thirteen to twentieth century, Muslims scholars particularly originated from Central Asia, were keen to regard the Buddha as prophets, not just from theological and historical argument, but from the philological argument as well. By comparing the Buddha with Islamic teaching, there are proofs that Muslim Scholars are keen to be close with other religions – in particular Buddhism, by identifying the similarity elements of both religions. In additions, it is shown that Islam is always concern in promoting good relationship with other religions using the best approaches.

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