

Islam and Local Cultural Acculturation in the Indonesian Archipelago

(A Study of Religious Traditions in Java, Kalimantan, and Sumatra)

Purnamasari¹, Sami Barkah²

¹ Sharia Ekonomi Law Study Program, Faculty of law, UNISSAS, Indonesia
e-mail: purnama2004sari@gmail.com

²Islamic philosophy, University of Zawia, Libya, e-mail: s.barkah@zu.edu.ly

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ABSTRACT

The acculturation of Islam with local cultures in the Indonesian archipelago represents a unique historical phenomenon, distinct from the spread of Islam in other regions due to its peaceful, adaptive, and culturally embedded approach. This study aims to analyze and compare the patterns of Islamic acculturation with local traditions in three representative regions: Java (focusing on the Walisongo legacy and Slametan traditions), Kalimantan (specifically the Malay Sultanate of Sambas with its Tepuk Tepung Tawar and Saprahan rituals), and Sumatra (examining the Minangkabau philosophical-legal synthesis Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah and Acehnese institutional dualism of Keuchik and Meunasah). Employing a qualitative library research method with a historical-comparative approach, this study analyzes primary sources such as ancient manuscripts (Salsilah Raja-Raja Sambas, Fathul 'Arifin), ethnographic literature, and contemporary scholarly works. The findings reveal three distinct acculturation typologies: cultural-dialogical in Java (negotiating form and substance), integrative-structural in Sambas (embedding Islam into ethnic identity and bureaucratic governance), and institutional-philosophical in Sumatra (resolving customary law with fiqh through legal compromise). Despite these divergent paths, the study confirms the unwavering preservation of Tawhid (the oneness of God) as the theological core, while Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) demonstrated remarkable flexibility by utilizing the concepts of 'urf (local custom) and maslahah (public interest) to harmonize with local wisdom. This research validates the theories of "Pribumisasi Islam" (Indigenization of Islam) and Vernacularization, demonstrating that Islam in the archipelago enriched, rather than erased, local cultural identities. The study recommends further ethnographic research to explore the contemporary resilience of these acculturated traditions in the face of modernization and puritanical movements.

Keywords : Acculturation; Islam Nusantara; Local Culture; Java; Kalimantan; Sumatra; Tawhid; 'Urf

ABSTRAK

Akulturasinya Islam dengan budaya lokal di Nusantara merupakan fenomena sejarah yang unik, berbeda dari penyebaran Islam di kawasan lain karena pendekatannya yang damai, adaptif, dan melebur dengan budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan membandingkan pola akulturasinya Islam dengan tradisi lokal di tiga wilayah representatif: Jawa (fokus pada warisan Walisongo dan tradisi Slametan), Kalimantan (khususnya Kesultanan Melayu Sambas dengan ritual Tepuk Tepung Tawar dan Saprahan), dan Sumatra (mengkaji sintesis filosofis-legal Minangkabau Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah serta dualisme institusional Aceh antara Keuchik dan Meunasah). Menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif kepustakaan dengan pendekatan komparatif-historis, studi ini menganalisis sumber-sumber primer seperti naskah kuno (Salsilah Raja-Raja Sambas, Fathul 'Arifin), literatur etnografi, dan karya ilmiah kontemporer. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan tiga tipologi akulturasinya yang berbeda: kultural-dialogis di Jawa (negosiasi antara bentuk dan substansi), integratif-struktural di Sambas (meleburnya Islam ke dalam identitas etnis dan birokrasi kesultanan), serta institusional-filosofis di Sumatra (resolusi hukum adat dengan fiqh melalui kompromi legal). Meskipun memiliki jalur

yang berbeda, penelitian ini menegaskan terpeliharanya esensi Tauhid sebagai inti teologis, sementara yurisprudensi Islam (fiqh) menunjukkan fleksibilitasnya yang luar biasa dengan memanfaatkan konsep 'urf (adat kebiasaan) dan masalah (kemaslahatan umum) untuk berharmoni dengan kearifan lokal. Riset ini memvalidasi teori "Pribumisasi Islam" dan Vernakularisasi, yang membuktikan bahwa Islam di Nusantara memperkaya, bukan menghapus, identitas budaya lokal. Penelitian lanjutan dengan pendekatan etnografi disarankan untuk mengeksplorasi ketahanan kontemporer tradisi-tradisi akulturasi ini di tengah modernisasi dan gerakan puritan.

Kata Kunci : Akulturasi; Islam Nusantara; Budaya Lokal; Jawa; Kalimantan; Sumatra; Tauhid; 'Urf

Corresponding Author : Purnamasari, UNISSAS, Jl. Raya Sejangkung No. 126, Education Area, Sebayon Village, Sambas District, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, e-mail: purnama2004sari@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The penetration and development of Islam in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Malay–Indonesian Archipelago, represent a paradigm of religious expansion that differs fundamentally from the historical experience of Islamic dissemination in the Middle East, North Africa, or the Iberian Peninsula. Within the maritime landscape of the archipelago, Islam did not establish its roots through the vanguard of military expansion or coercive political conquest. Instead, it emerged and developed through relatively peaceful social relations, following international trade networks that connected the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea, as well as through early religious educational institutions and sustained processes of cultural interaction (Safrina et al., 2025). The arrival of Islam in this region necessitated a prolonged and complex dialectical engagement with the well-established Hindu–Buddhist civilizational framework, as well as with local systems of animistic and dynamistic beliefs that had been internalized within the cognitive structures of indigenous societies for centuries (Mawarni et al., 2024).

The success of this cultural approach cannot be separated from the highly sophisticated *da‘wah* methodology employed by the early disseminators of Islam, particularly the itinerant Sufi preachers and the institution of the *Walisongo* (the Nine Saints) in Java. These scholars functioned not merely as theological missionaries (agents of *da‘wah*), but assumed a far more crucial role as agents of cultural transformation (Adam et al., 2023). Through a Sufistic approach (*tasawwuf*), Islam was introduced not as a rigid formal legal dogma, but rather as a spiritual path that possessed a strong resonance with the contemplative and mystical inclinations already present within the local societies of the Indonesian archipelago (Al-Fairusy et al., 2024; Mufid, 2015; Syakur, 2022). This approach enabled indigenous communities to understand Islam as a form of inner spiritual cultivation that was compatible with their traditional values of wisdom, thereby preventing the emergence of disruptive cultural shocks of a destructive nature.

This historical phenomenon is closely aligned with what Azyumardi Azra (2004) conceptually formulated as “the vernacularization of Islam,” whereby the universal teachings of Islam were translated both linguistically—through the use of Malay as a *lingua franca* and the adaptation of the Arabic–Malay script (*Jawi*)—and conceptually, in order to correspond with the socio-political realities and the cultural norms of the Indonesian archipelago (Dr. Abdul Chalik, 2017; Fadhil et al., 2025). Scholarly networks that connected the *Haramain* (Mecca and Medina) with centers of power in the Indonesian archipelago ensured that the transmission of knowledge retained its authoritative character, while its practical application was adapted to local wisdom (Istiqomah et al., 2025). Furthermore, this discourse was enriched by the thought of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) through his idea of “the indigenization of Islam” (*Pribumisasi Islam*). This concept deliberately seeks to harmonize the ontological tension between textual Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and local traditions, ensuring that indigenous cultures do not lose their original identity, while Islam functions as a normative spirit that provides moral direction and ethical guidance (Hulaify, 2019a).

Despite the extensive body of academic literature on the Islamization process in Southeast Asia, a significant research gap remains in the comparative analysis of the topology of acculturation across regions. Much of the existing scholarship tends to compartmentalize studies within isolated geographical boundaries—for instance, research that exclusively examines mystical syncretism in Java, *adat* legalism in Sumatra, or courtly traditions in Kalimantan as separate phenomena. Such a fragmented approach fails to capture the macro-architecture of the broader phenomenon often referred to as *Islam Nusantara*.

Why is it important to examine the comparison of religious traditions in Java, Kalimantan (particularly the Sultanate of Sambas), and Sumatra (Minangkabau and Aceh)



simultaneously? These three regions represent civilizational epicenters characterized by markedly different geopolitical landscapes, pre-colonial historical trajectories, and indigenous kinship systems. Java represents an inland agrarian civilization with a deeply entrenched Hindu–Buddhist hierarchical legacy; Sumatra represents a coastal civilization that is relatively egalitarian yet strongly bound by communal legal systems (such as the matrilineal tradition in Minangkabau); meanwhile, Kalimantan represents a riverine society in which Malay ethnic identity is intricately intertwined with the bureaucratic structure of the sultanate. (Elmansyah et al., 2024). Comparing these three regions simultaneously reveals a striking sociological reality: how an identical theological doctrine (*tawhīd*) and the same universal legal framework (*fiqh*) can metamorphose into markedly different cultural manifestations when responding to distinct local social structures. This comparative inquiry is essential for demonstrating that Islam did not integrate the Indonesian archipelago through cultural homogenization (Arabization), but rather through an intelligent engagement with and adaptation to local pluralities.

Based on the background and the identified research gap, this study formulates three principal questions: How are the specific forms of the acculturation process between Islam and local cultures manifested in the religious traditions of Java, Kalimantan (Sambas), and Sumatra (Aceh and Minangkabau); How are the theological essence of *tawhīd* and the normative values of Islamic law (*fiqh*) able to adapt and transform without losing their original substance amid the dominance of local cultural frameworks; What fundamental characteristics distinguish the patterns of acculturation in these three regions of the archipelago from a comparative sociological perspective. Therefore, this study aims to systematically identify, examine, and analyze the typology of Islamic cultural acculturation in the Indonesian archipelago. Its ultimate objective is to construct a theoretical synthesis explaining how a universal religion can be locally indigenized, to contribute to the scholarly literature in the fields of the sociology of religion and the history of Islamic culture, and to formulate a comprehensive framework for understanding the resilience and dynamics of religiosity among Muslim societies in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

To unravel the complexity of cultural acculturation and religious assimilation that has unfolded over centuries in the Indonesian archipelago, this study is designed using a qualitative methodology grounded in an interpretive paradigm. The specific approach employed is library research, combined with comparative-historical analysis. The use of qualitative methods is crucial in this study, as the research does not aim to quantify phenomena; rather, it seeks to explore the subjective meanings, historical trajectories, and structural logic underlying religious rituals and the application of customary law in the three regions that constitute the focus of the study.

Data collection was conducted through an extensive heuristic exploration of both primary and secondary textual sources. These textual materials were gathered from academic repositories, previously published scholarly journals, and authoritative historical literature. The analysis of classical manuscripts plays a vital role in this study, particularly in relation to the Kalimantan region. The researcher undertakes a critical reading of classical historiographical texts such as *Salsilah Raja-Raja Sambas* and *Asal Raja-Raja Sambas*, as well as Sufi manuscripts such as *Fathul ‘Arifin* authored by Ahmad Khatib Sambas, which provide authentic evidence regarding the genealogy of power, political legitimacy, and the early integration of Islamic law into the bureaucratic structure of the Malay Sultanate of Sambas. (Musa, 2003).

For the Sumatra region, data collection focuses on the analysis of fundamental ethnographic texts and legal codifications that elaborate the philosophy of *Adat Basandi*



Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah (ABS-SBK) in Minangkabau. Literature that examines, from a jurisprudential perspective, the text Takmilah Zubdatil Hadits and its comparison with the matrilineal inheritance system is analyzed in order to observe how conflicts in inheritance law are resolved (Yuhaldi, 2022). In addition, decrees and socio-historical literature concerning the Meunasah system, the institution of the Keuchik, and the Peusijek ritual in Aceh constitute a primary focus of data collection, in order to analyze the spatial and leadership dualism within the Gampong social structure (Marzuki, 2011a). Meanwhile, for the Javanese region, data are drawn from classical literature on the da'wah methodology of the Walisongo, ancient Javanese serat manuscripts, and contemporary ethnographic reports that document the practice of syncretic rituals such as Slametan and the Sekaten ceremony (Syamsuddin, 2004).

The data analysis procedure was conducted through several rigorous stages: data reduction, thematic classification, historical–contextual interpretation, and the formulation of conclusions. Content analysis was applied to deconstruct the theological narratives embedded within these local traditions in order to extract the underlying principles of fiqh and the essential doctrine of tawhīd. After the data from each region had been interpreted, the researcher employed a comparative-historical method to juxtapose the three trajectories of Islamization. This process enabled an analytical comparison between the bureaucratic–structural integration found within the Malay society of Sambas in Kalimantan, the cultural–dialogical diffusion observed in Java, and the institutional socio-legal synthesis characteristic of Sumatra. The comparative matrix of these three entities is expected to generate a comprehensive synthesis, moving beyond mere historical description toward the formulation of a robust sociological argument regarding the evolution of Islam in the Indonesian archipelago.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Java: Cultural–Dialogical Acculturation and Substantive Piety

The process through which Islam entered and developed in Java represents one of the most remarkable and sophisticated examples in the history of Islamic civilization regarding cultural–dialogical integration. Initiated by the saintly preachers collectively known as the Walisongo—such as Sunan Kalijaga and Sunan Bonang—Islam in Java did not arrive with an unsheathed sword or with iconoclastic impulses seeking to destroy the cultural artifacts of Hindu–Buddhist and Javanese animistic traditions that had existed for centuries. Rather than eradicating local culture, the saints chose a different path: to infuse monotheistic substance into the existing cultural forms and institutions (Adam et al., 2023; Syamsuddin, 2004). This approach was intrinsically substantive rather than merely emphasizing formalistic changes in outward expressions such as clothing or the adoption of the Arabic language.

The most prominent and institutionalized manifestation of this acculturation can be observed in the Sekaten tradition, which has been preserved and performed across generations by the royal courts that inherited the dynasty of the Islamic Mataram kingdom, namely the Yogyakarta Sultanate and the Surakarta Sunanate. In essence, the Sekaten tradition constitutes an Islamic religious celebration commemorating the Mawlid, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahmad et al., 2021; Lestari & Yunita, 2025; Purnamasari & Ribawati, 2025). Phenomenologically, however, the physical execution of this celebration fully utilizes the apparatus and traditions of the pre-Islamic royal courts. The core of the procession involves the performance of sacred gamelan heirloom instruments and the ceremonial procession of the gunungan, a towering arrangement of agricultural produce. Cosmologically, the mountain form in the Hindu–Javanese worldview represented Mount Meru, regarded as the axis of the universe and the dwelling place of the gods. Through the cultural ingenuity of the Walisongo, the meaning of the gunungan was deconstructed and reinterpreted as a representation of divine providence bestowed by God, as well as a manifestation of the Islamic concept of *ṣadaqah*



(charitable giving), which is distributed communally to the people. Furthermore, the term *Sekaten* itself constitutes a highly sophisticated phonetic vernacularization of the Arabic term *Shahādātayn*, referring to the two testimonies of faith that affirm that there is no deity except God and that the Prophet Muhammad is His messenger. The captivating sound of the gamelan serves to gather the masses in the courtyard of the grand mosque, where they are subsequently guided to recite the *shahāda* collectively.

Beyond the royal court milieu, at the grassroots level of ordinary society—often classified by several classical sociologists as the *abangan* community—the traditions of *Slametan* and *Tahlilan* function as spiritual anchors and as the backbone of social cohesion within Javanese society. The *Slametan* is a comprehensive communal feast ritual conducted during nearly every moment of crisis or transition within the human life cycle, including pregnancy, birth, circumcision, marriage, death, house construction, and even the celebration of harvest seasons. (Rofiq, 2019; Setiawati, 2019). From a historical–anthropological perspective, such communal feasts in the pre-Islamic period were typically accompanied by the recitation of animistic incantations intended to present offerings (*sajen*) to *dhanyang*—the guardian spirits of the village—or to other supernatural entities so that they would not disturb human life. The intervention of Islamic acculturation operated by preserving the sociological structure of these communal feasts, as the saintly preachers recognized that such gatherings were crucial for maintaining *rukun* (social harmony). At the same time, however, they radically removed the animistic elements embedded within the ritual practice (Kholil, 2008). Invocations intended to summon spirits were systematically replaced with the recitation of sacred verses from the Qur’an—particularly *Surah Yā Sīn*—along with *dhikr* in the form of *tahlil* affirming the oneness of God, and the chanting of *ṣalawāt* upon the Prophet Muhammad. The cultural container of the ritual—such as traditional foods and the circular seating arrangement—remained distinctly local in character, yet the trajectory of prayer and its theological orientation were unequivocally directed toward God, the One and.

In the realm of performing arts, *Wayang Kulit* underwent a transformation that was no less revolutionary. Originally, this art form functioned as a ritual medium for recounting the great Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, which are imbued with theological elements of pantheism and polytheism. The saintly preachers—particularly *Sunan Kalijaga*—adapted the physical form of the puppets to make them more abstract, aligning with Islamic norms that discourage realistic depictions of living beings. At the same time, they infused the narrative structures with esoteric teachings of Sufism (*tasawwuf*). Within this reinterpretation, the divine figures of the original epics were symbolically downgraded to the status of ancestors or ordinary beings subject to the authority of *Sang Hyang Tunggal* (the One Supreme God). Furthermore, the iconic *Punakawan* characters—*Semar*, *Gareng*, *Petruk*, and *Bagong*—were introduced as representations of the common people while simultaneously functioning as philosophical conduits for the dissemination of Islamic teachings. (Afiatun, 2021). Consequently, *Wayang* evolved from merely a mythological spectacle into a powerful form of theological guidance, serving as an effective medium for the widespread dissemination of Islam without provoking cultural resistance.

B. Kalimantan: Integrative–Structural Acculturation within the Malay Society of the Sambas Sultanate

Significantly different from the cultural–dialogical pattern implemented by the saintly preachers in Java—who engaged with an agrarian social structure and the legacy of Hindu syncretism—the acculturation of Islam in Kalimantan, with the locus of observation centered on the Sambas Sultanate in Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan, operated through an integrative–structural mechanism (Risa, 2014). In this region, the process of Islamization



unfolded comprehensively through the bureaucratic structures of the socio-political system and was driven by the legitimizing authority of the royal court. As a result, it produced forms of religiosity that were comparatively more formalistic and deeply rooted as a fundamental component of Malay ethnic identity.

The historical roots of this structural acculturation are recorded in detail in classical manuscripts such as *Salsilah Raja-Raja Sambas* and *Asal Raja-Raja Sambas* (Musa, 2003). These texts illustrate an epistemological transition in the manner through which the early ruler, Raden Sulaiman—later known as Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin I—constructed his political legitimacy. Notably, the legitimacy of the Sambas court was not grounded solely in local genealogical lineage (such as connections to the Hindu kingdom of Sepuduk or the legacy of Majapahit), but was instead emphasized through dynastic connections and Islamic legitimacy that traced its authority to the lineage of the Prophet Muhammad through the Brunei Sultanate. Within such a structural milieu, affiliation with Islam was institutionalized and effectively mandated by the state. Consequently, the sociological meaning of ethnic identity underwent a significant transformation: the expression “becoming Malay” (*masuk Melayu*) gradually became, both semantically and practically, synonymous with “becoming Muslim” (Hermansyah, 2010). The sultanate even established the office of Maharaja Imam—functionally comparable to a royal mufti—to ensure that the implementation of Shari‘ah operated in parallel with the policies and administrative authority of the royal court (Abdillah, 2021; Erwin, 2018). The ritual life and religious traditions of the Malay community in Sambas reflect a seamless synthesis between the Islamic theology of *tawhīd* and the local wisdom of Malay culture.

One of its most prominent representations is the *Tepuk Tepung Tawar* (or *Tepung Tawar*) tradition, a ritual of blessing that is consistently present in the life cycle and major transitional phases of the Sambas Malay community, including ceremonies for birth, circumcision, *mulang-mulangkan* and *balik tikar* (a series of post-marital rites), as well as the inauguration of a new house (Taufik et al., 2016). From a historical–anthropological perspective, the act of sprinkling water mixed with fragrant leaves and scattering yellow rice originated from earlier agrarian traditions that functioned as rituals of warding off misfortune (*tolak bala*) and as means of invoking supernatural entities. However, within the Sambas Sultanate, court scholars fundamentally reconstructed the philosophical meaning of this ritual. In its contemporary form, the *Tepuk Tepung Tawar* ceremony has been fully detached from notions of polytheistic belief. The ritual is invariably preceded or accompanied by the recitation of *tahlīl*, verses from the Qur’an—reflecting the phenomenon often discussed in Living Qur’an studies—and the chanting of *Doa Selamat* delivered in Arabic. (Januardi et al., 2022). The symbolism of the flour and the leaves is no longer interpreted as possessing magical properties; rather, it functions merely as a cultural medium that signifies purity of heart, the hope for harmony and tranquility within the household, and prayers for well-being that are directed exclusively to God.

Another prominent acculturative tradition is the *Saprahan* culture. This tradition represents a distinctive form of communal dining among the Sambas Malay community, in which food is served in a seated floor arrangement, placed in a particular order, and shared collectively by a group of participants seated around it (Hasmika & Ar, 2022). Although it may appear merely as a form of traditional dining etiquette, *Saprahan* in fact represents the institutionalization of Islamic educational values related to egalitarianism and social solidarity (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*). Local wisdom teaches that by sitting equally on the floor—without chairs or tables that might create hierarchical distinctions—all boundaries of social hierarchy, economic status, and governmental rank are symbolically dissolved. This practice reflects the



theological principle in Islam that all human beings are essentially equal before God, and that the only distinction among them lies in the degree of their piety.

The profound integration of *tawhīd* into local culture in West Kalimantan was further accelerated by the extensive influence of Nusantara's scholarly networks and the dissemination of Sufi orders. This is evidenced by the central role of Ahmad Khatib Sambas—a renowned scholar from Sambas who later gained prominence in Mecca and founded the Qādiriyyah wa Naqshbandiyyah Sufi order—as well as by the circulation of Sufi-oriented manuscripts such as Fathul 'Arifin throughout the Sambas Sultanate and even into the inland regions of Kapuas Hulu. This Sufi approach cultivated a deep mystical consciousness, allowing the practice of Islamic law (*sharī'ah*) to be experienced by the Malay community not as a rigid legal structure, but rather as a spiritual rhythm that naturally permeates the spheres of bureaucracy and everyday cultural life.

C. Sumatra: Institutional Synthesis and the Philosophical Amalgamation of Customary Law

On the island of Sumatra—particularly in the context of the Minangkabau society of the West Sumatran highlands and the coastal civilization of the Aceh Sultanate—the acculturation of Islam assumed a highly distinctive character: legalistic, institutional, and grounded in philosophical debates that ultimately produced a profound synthesis. Whereas in Java syncretism primarily unfolded within the domains of art and mysticism, in Sumatra the principal point of encounter—and at times tension—emerged within the constitutional framework of society itself, namely between the established system of customary law (*adat*) and the jurisprudential framework of Islamic law (*fiqh*).

1. Minangkabau: The Cosmic Philosophy of ABS–SBK

The Minangkabau society represents one of the most unique case studies of cultural acculturation within the Islamic world. While maintaining a strongly orthodox Islamic identity, they simultaneously uphold the largest matrilineal kinship system in the world, in which lineage and descent are traced through the maternal line (M. Munir, 2021; A. Setiawan, 2019). The tension between customary tradition (*adat*) and Islamic law (*sharī'ah*) reached its peak in the early nineteenth century during the Padri War, which ultimately culminated in a profound philosophical resolution and a grand consensus expressed in the well-known maxim: *Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah (ABS–SBK)* (Mughits et al., 2025; D. B. Setiawan & Oktarina, 2023). This philosophy literally means: “Customary law is based on Islamic law, and Islamic law is based on the Book of God (the Qur'an).” (Yuhaldi, 2022). This structural declaration establishes an absolute epistemological hierarchy: no product of Minangkabau customary law or local culture is permitted to contradict the fundamental teachings of Islam. In the event of any conflict, Islamic law (*sharī'ah*) takes precedence.

The most sensitive and compelling point of acculturative tension occurs within the domain of family inheritance law. Minangkabau customary law stipulates that *Harta Pusaka Tinggi*—ancestral property such as communal land (*ulayat*), rice fields, or the *rumah gadang*—is collectively controlled and inherited according to the maternal lineage (Abidin et al., 2024; Muin, 2025). At first glance, this communal–matrilineal ownership appears to directly conflict with the Islamic inheritance system (*Ilm al-Farā'id*), which follows patrilineal or bilateral principles and emphasizes individualistic property division with specific shares allotted to male heirs. However, Islamic legal sociology in Minangkabau navigated this tension with remarkable ingenuity. Through comparative study with *fiqh* texts such as *Takmilah Zubdatil Hadits*, the local *ulama*—collectively known as *Tungku Tigo Sajaringan*—and the *ninik mamak* (customary elders) reconstructed the ontology of these ancestral assets. They reached a consensus that *Harta Pusaka Tinggi* is not categorized as “inheritance property” (*tirkah*)



subject to *Farā'id*. Instead, its legal status is redefined as a form of communal grant (*hibah*) or, more precisely, as a family *waqf* (ALFARISI, 2025).

The purpose of this arrangement aligns with the objectives of *Sharī'ah* (*Maqāsid al-Sharī'ah*), namely to protect the welfare of women and ensure the economic continuity of the extended family. Conversely, assets acquired independently by a married couple during their union—referred to as *Harta Pusaka Rendah*—are fully subject to the individualistic rules of *Farā'id*. This intellectual compromise demonstrates that *Minangkabau adat* is not opposed to Islam; rather, it functions as a protective framework that facilitates the application of *sharī'ah* in response to communal ecological and social realities. Moreover, the institutional existence of *adat* at the village level (*Nagari*) is structured managerially so that these dual entities operate simultaneously as guardians of customary law and as moral guides for religious practice

2. Aceh: The Sociological Duality of *Meunasah* and *Keuchik*

Shifting to the northern tip of Sumatra, Aceh—epically known as the “Veranda of Mecca”—demonstrates a model of acculturation that emphasizes the institutionalization of Islamic values within the physical and social space, as well as the hierarchical structure of political leadership at the *Gampong* (village) level. In the sociological philosophy of Acehese society, the integration of *adat* and religion is existentially inseparable. This principle is poetically and theologically captured in the traditional proverb (*hadih maja*): “*Hukum ngoen Adat lagee zat ngoen sipheut*”—meaning that religious law and customary law are like a substance and its inherent attributes, inseparable in essence (Andriyadi, 2015).

The concrete implementation of this philosophy manifests in the form of dual leadership within the *Gampong* structure. Administrative governance, secular policy, and worldly security are overseen by the *Keuchik* (village head), while moral guidance, enforcement of *sharī'ah*, and the conduct of religious worship are led by the *Imum Meunasah* (Iqbal et al., 2025). The *Meunasah*—derived from the Arabic *madrasah*—physically takes the form of a modest place of worship at the heart of the village, yet it is far more than a simple prayer hall for the five daily prayers. The *Meunasah* transforms into a cosmic center of communal integration, serving as the venue where customary law is deliberated and Islamic teachings are disseminated.

The division of customary legal domains in Aceh is deeply infused with Islamic principles, with local wisdom categorized as follows: *Adatullah* – absolute *adat* grounded in the commandments of God and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet; *Adat Tunnah* – *qanun* and *reusam* governing societal life and communal order; *Adat Muhakaman* – *adat* based on deliberation and consensus-building (Andriyadi, 2015).

In the realm of religious ritual, the Acehese community preserves the *Peusijek* tradition, which functionally parallels the *Tepuk Tepung Tawar* ceremony in *Sambas*. Literally meaning “to cool” or “to purify,” *Peusijek* is a ceremonial blessing performed to pray for an individual’s safety during critical life phases, including circumcision, marriage, deliverance from calamities, and the sending-off of pilgrims embarking on the *Hajj* to the Holy Land (Marzuki, 2011b). Although the ritual employs specific materials—such as *sijek* leaves, rice, and scented powder water—which are remnants of Acehese pre-Islamic cultural artifacts, its substance has been fully Islamicized. The *Peusijek* ceremony must be led by a *Teungku* (religious leader), who, while sprinkling the water, does not recite magical incantations; instead, he whispers prayers imbued with Sufi (*ṭarīqah*) spirituality, invoking God’s mercy and sending *ṣalawāt* upon the Prophet Muhammad. In this transformation, the ritual shifts from a polytheistic animistic instrument to a legitimate (*tabarruk*) medium for seeking divine blessings, while still providing psychological tranquility to its participants.



D. The Theological Essence (Tawḥīd) Uniting Cultural Plurality and the Adaptation of Islamic Law (Fiqh) through the Theory of ‘Urf and Flexibility

The most fundamental finding uniting the phenomena across these three islands is the absolute and uncompromising commitment to preserving the concept of Tawḥīd—the unequivocal acknowledgment of the Oneness of God. From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, this dynamic can be analyzed through Robert Redfield’s theoretical framework regarding the encounter between the Great Tradition (universal orthodox Islamic texts derived from the Qur’an and Hadith) and the Little Tradition (local customs and cultural practices at the communal or village level). The Indonesian case confirms that, in this process of acculturation, the Little Tradition does not seek to subvert the doctrines of the Great Tradition. Rather, it provides a vernacular conduit or cultural logistical vehicle, enabling the abstract doctrines of tawḥīd from the Great Tradition to be comprehended, internalized, and practiced by local communities without resistance (Rahman, 2018).

This can be analyzed through the lens of ontological transformation. In the Slametan tradition in Java, the Tepuk Tepung Tawar in Sambas, and the Peusijek in Aceh, the physical and material cultural artifacts are preserved in their entirety (Riezal et al., 2018). Leaves, holy water, rice pyramids (tumpang), and gamelan ensembles remain the centerpieces of these communal ritual celebrations. However, the theological “soul” and the intended object of devotion are radically transformed. The arranged food and sprinkled water are entirely stripped of any magical agency or supernatural autonomy. These objects are no longer conceptualized as offerings meant to appease dhanyang, Hindu deities, or astral beings (Annabila et al., 2024). Instead, these material elements are positioned purely as symbolic manifestations of human culture, expressing gratitude (syukur bi al-ni‘mah) and sincere supplication for protection directed exclusively to the One Entity: Allah SWT.

Muslim scholars—including the Walisongo, Ahmad Khatib Sambas, and the Minangkabau ulama—demonstrated a profound understanding of social psychology. Had they indiscriminately abolished communal rituals such as Slametan or Peusijek, they would have risked dismantling social cohesion and provoking collective trauma. By preserving the cultural shell while substituting its spiritual core with Surah Yā Sīn recitations and Tahlīl, these preachers successfully orchestrated a seamless mass theological transition. This dialectical process perfectly realizes K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid’s grand thesis on “Pribumisasi Islam” (the Indigenization of Islam). According to Gus Dur, Islam manifests as a normative divine teaching that is accommodated within human-formed culture so that neither entity loses its essential identity: Islam maintains its orthodox commitment to tawḥīd, while local culture continues to thrive with its original wisdom intact. (Hulaify, 2019b; M. M. Munir, 2022).

The second determining factor in the success of this acculturation lies in the epistemological flexibility deeply embedded within the system of Islamic jurisprudence (Uṣūl al-Fiqh). The phenomenon often described as Islam Nusantara was not constructed upon rigid Arab literalism; rather, it operates through progressive legal mechanisms that allow local wisdom to function as a legitimate source in the formulation of civil law. The theoretical foundation of this flexibility rests upon the well-known fihiyyah maxim al-‘ādah muḥakkamah—that customary practice may be recognized as a basis for legal judgment—and the juridical concept of ‘urf, referring to socially accepted customs or norms that are regarded as good and reasonable within a community (Fuadi et al., 2023). This aligns with the approach of Islamic Legal Sociology, as exemplified by Imam al-Shāfi‘ī—whose school of jurisprudence dominates the Nusantara region—where the character of his legal opinions (fatwā) could adapt to geographic and socio-political contexts. This flexibility is evident in the distinction between the qaul qadīm issued in Iraq and the qaul jadīd formulated later in Egypt, demonstrating that jurisprudential reasoning can respond dynamically to local circumstances (Azmi, 2010).



The application of ‘urf reached its pinnacle in the Nusantara through ingenious resolutions concerning inheritance in Minangkabau and the integration of law in Aceh. Confronted with the communal, matrilineal system of Harta Pusaka Tinggi, the Sumatran ulama did not declare the adat invalid, even though it formally contradicted the patrilineal provisions of Farā’id. By exercising ijtihād grounded in public interest (maṣlaḥah mursalah), they invoked other instruments of Islamic law—such as the concepts of waqf or conditional communal grants—to legally frame Harta Pusaka Tinggi within Shari‘ah. They recognized that the objective of Shari‘ah—particularly the economic protection of women—was far more substantive and should take precedence over literal compliance with formal inheritance rules. This jurisprudential flexibility illustrates that Islamic doctrine does not seek to obliterate local custom (adat), but rather acts as a comprehensive umbrella that affirms ‘urf so long as it does not transgress the boundaries of tawḥīd and moral propriety.

E. Comparative Characteristics of Acculturation Across the Three Geographic Regions

Although unified by a shared commitment to reinforcing Tawḥīd and adapting Fiqh, the divergent geopolitical contexts, precolonial cosmologies, and bureaucratic structures of Java, Kalimantan, and Sumatra have produced macro-acculturation patterns that are highly sociologically distinct. The comparative characteristics of these acculturative trajectories can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Comparative Characteristics of Acculturation Across the Three Geographic Regions

No	Sociological Comparison Dimension	Java (Focus: Mataram/Demak Sultanates, Abangan Community)	Kalimantan (Focus: Sambas Malay Sultanate)	Sumatra (Focus: Aceh & Minangkabau)
1	Primary Pattern & Approach	Cultural-Dialogic; subtle and continuous negotiation with inherited syncretism to maintain cosmic harmony.	Integrative-Structural; Islamization driven top-down through governmental bureaucracy.	Institutional-Philosophical (Legalistic); integration resolved through village institutions and customary law consensus.
2	Agents of Change	Walisongo (mystical Sufi figures acting as cultural mediators and educators of the masses).	Court elites/Sultan, Maharaja Imam, and global network of scholars (e.g., Syekh Ahmad Khatib Sambas).	Ninik Mamak (customary leaders) collaborating with Ulama (Tungku Tigo Sajarangan / Teungku).
3	Characteristics of Religious Practice	Oriented toward Substantive Piety & Mysticism/Syncretism; prioritizes spiritual essence over formal legalism.	Oriented toward Identity Formalism; “becoming Malay” is synonymous with being a complete Muslim.	Oriented toward Synthesized Dualism (Legalistic); strong enforcement of moral and public law.
4	Main Acculturative Medium	Wayang, Gamelan (Sekaten), and life-cycle communal feasts (Slametan / Tahlilan).	Formal life-cycle rituals (such as Tepuk Tepung Tawar) and egalitarian communal etiquette (Saprahan).	Constitutional philosophy ABS-SBK (Minang), village spatial configuration Meunasah, and Sufi blessing rituals Peusijuek (Aceh).
5	Mechanism of Resolving Customary vs	Assimilation: outer cultural shell (wayang, offerings) preserved, but the spiritual	Bureaucratic Integration: customary concepts codified and	Juridical Compromise & Role Distribution: communal inheritance classified as waqf, with

	Religious Conflict	core fully replaced with Islamic monotheistic prayer.	standardized to align with sultanate laws based on Islam.	village administrative leadership assigned to Keuchik and religious duties to Imum Meunasah.
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Based on the sociological matrix above, it can be interpreted that the radical differences between the islands arise from the nature of the cultural “counterforces” they confronted. In Java, the Walisongo faced a highly developed agrarian Hindu-Buddhist imperial civilization, deeply invested in metaphysics and aesthetics; Islam engaged and transformed it through the subtlety of artistic expression and spiritual feasting (cultural-dialogic approach). In West Kalimantan, particularly the Sambas Malay Sultanate, the primary challenge was to construct a civilized and autonomous ethnic identity amid fragmented riverine politics; Islam institutionalized this identity structurally and formally through state bureaucracy (integrative-structural approach). Meanwhile, in Sumatra, the precolonial social entities in Minangkabau and Aceh already possessed communal village republic systems (Nagari and Gampong) with highly entrenched customary law traditions. Consequently, Islam employed a legal-philosophical negotiation approach, producing hybrid constitutional frameworks such as Adat Basandi Syarak and the dual leadership system of Keuchik–Meunasah.

This study validates the theories of “Indigenization of Islam” and “Vernacularization,” demonstrating that, despite extensive local adaptation and the strengthening of Little Tradition, the theological foundation of Islam concerning the Oneness of God (Tawhid – Great Tradition) remained entirely intact. Furthermore, the success of these institutional adaptations highlights the progressive nature of Islamic jurisprudence, which skillfully employs the methodologies of ‘urf (recognition of local norms) and al-‘adah muhakkamah (custom as a legal basis) to harmonize the objectives of Shariah (Maqashid al-Shariah) with the preservation of indigenous wisdom.

CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical, sociological, and historical analyses presented, this study draws the fundamental conclusion that the historical trajectory of Islam in the Nusantara archipelago represents a cultural miracle. The successful penetration of the religion into one of the world’s most ethnically diverse regions was achieved not through the suppression of local cultures (iconoclasm), but through the extraordinary capacity of Islamic theology and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to accommodate, assimilate, and vernacularize in harmony with indigenous wisdom.

Addressing the research questions, the comparative analysis reveals that the acculturation processes followed three distinct macro-trajectories, each fully guided by the local socio-political context. In Java, Islamic integration proceeded along a cultural-dialogic pathway, where the Walisongo brilliantly infused the philosophy of Tauhid into the shell of syncretic culture: Mahabharata shadow plays were transformed into mediums for monotheistic da‘wah, magical incantations in the Slametan ritual were replaced with Qur’anic recitations, and Hindu-Buddhist symbols in Sekaten gamelan traditions were reinterpreted as declarations of the Shahada. In Kalimantan, particularly within the cultural domain of the Sambas Malay Sultanate, acculturation operated through an integrative-structural method, fully embedding Islamic identity into the lifeblood of Malay ethnicity and state bureaucracy (as documented in the Salsilah Raja-Raja Sambas manuscripts). This produced formalistic religious practices suffused with Sufi mysticism, exemplified in the egalitarian communal ritual Saprahan and the cyclical life-cycle prayers of Tepuk Tepung Tawar. Meanwhile, Sumatra presents a framework of philosophical-institutional (legalistic) amalgamation, balancing the rigidity of autonomous

customary law with universal divine law. This culminates in the resolution of communal inheritance (Harta Pusaka Tinggi) under the constitutional framework of Adat Basandi Syarak, Syarak Basandi Kitabullah (ABS-SBK) in Minangkabau, and the crystallization of dual leadership between secular political space (Keuchik) and spiritual-jurisprudential authority (Meunasah) overseeing the Peusijek ritual in Aceh.

As a foundational study in the fields of Islamic Cultural History and Anthropology of Religion, the limitation of this research lies in its reliance on historical texts and classical literature. Therefore, to complement the scholarly architecture regarding Islam Nusantara, it is highly recommended that future research employ participatory observational ethnography, directly examining the contemporary impact on these traditions. Future scholars are encouraged to critically investigate how deeply rooted acculturative traditions—such as Slametan, Tepung Tawar, and Peusijek—persist amid third-wave modernity, particularly under pressures from digital globalization, urban secularization, and the ideological influence of transnational puritanical Islamic movements that often classify acculturative practices as bid'ah or superstition. Longitudinal studies on the resilience of the Indigenization of Islam in the digital era would provide invaluable contributions to the preservation of religious moderation (wasathiyah) in Indonesia and globally..

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