

## **Islam and Local Culture: The Acculturation Formed by Walisongo in Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the dynamic interaction between Islam and local cultures in Indonesia, focusing on the acculturation process catalyzed by the Walisongo. The historical context of Indonesia during the Walisongo period encompassed diverse local cultures, including animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and indigenous beliefs. The Walisongo adopted an inclusive approach, adapting Islamic teachings to align with local cultural norms, languages, and traditions. This study reveals how this approach facilitated the gradual spread of Islam, leading to its harmonious integration with the rich tapestry of local culture. Recognizing the significance of effective communication, the Walisongo employed local languages, arts, and customs to convey Islamic principles. This strategy forged bridges of understanding between Islam and Indonesia's varied cultures, fostering unity and inclusivity. As a result of this acculturation, unique local Islamic traditions emerged, marked by the fusion of Islamic practices with pre-existing customs and rituals. The incorporation of Islamic values into traditional cultural expressions, such as the use of the wayang kulit shadow puppet theater in Javanese culture, exemplifies this harmonious coexistence. Unlike an assimilationist approach, the Walisongo embraced cultural diversity and preserved indigenous beliefs, effectively integrating them into Islamic practices. This preservation of local identity and cultural heritage ensured that communities maintained their distinctiveness while embracing the tenets of Islam. The process of acculturation not only promoted socio-religious harmony but also established mutual respect and peaceful coexistence by accommodating local customs and beliefs. This research sheds light on the transformative impact of the Walisongo's approach in diffusing Islam across the archipelago. Their inclusive and adaptive methods resulted in a unique Indonesian Islamic identity, characterized by the harmonious interplay of Islamic values with diverse cultural expressions. As Indonesia continues to navigate its religious and cultural landscape, the Walisongo's legacy serves as a potent testament to the potential for peaceful coexistence and unity within the intricate fabric of diversity. This study offers valuable insights for contemporary scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders seeking to understand the enduring legacy of the Walisongo and the importance of embracing cultural diversity for societal cohesion and inclusivity.

**Keywords:** *Islam, Walisongo, Local Culture.*

## Abstrak

Artikel ini mengeksplorasi interaksi dinamis antara Islam dan budaya lokal di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada proses akulturasi yang dikatalisasi oleh Walisongo. Konteks sejarah Indonesia pada masa Walisongo mencakup beragam budaya lokal, termasuk animisme, Hindu-Buddha, dan kepercayaan lokal. Walisongo mengadopsi pendekatan inklusif, mengadaptasi ajaran Islam agar selaras dengan norma-norma budaya, bahasa, dan tradisi lokal. Studi ini mengungkapkan bagaimana pendekatan ini memfasilitasi penyebaran Islam secara bertahap, yang mengarah pada integrasi yang harmonis dengan permadani budaya lokal yang kaya. Menyadari pentingnya komunikasi yang efektif, Walisongo menggunakan bahasa, seni, dan adat istiadat setempat untuk menyampaikan prinsip-prinsip Islam. Strategi ini membangun jembatan pemahaman antara Islam dan budaya Indonesia yang beragam, memupuk persatuan dan inklusivitas. Sebagai hasil dari akulturasi ini, muncullah tradisi-tradisi Islam lokal yang unik, yang ditandai dengan perpaduan antara praktik-praktik Islam dengan adat istiadat dan ritual-ritual yang sudah ada sebelumnya. Penggabungan nilai-nilai Islam ke dalam ekspresi budaya tradisional, seperti penggunaan teater wayang kulit dalam budaya Jawa, merupakan contoh koeksistensi yang harmonis ini. Tidak seperti pendekatan asimilasi, Walisongo merangkul keragaman budaya dan melestarikan kepercayaan lokal, dan secara efektif mengintegrasikannya ke dalam praktik-praktik Islam. Pelestarian identitas lokal dan warisan budaya ini memastikan bahwa masyarakat tetap mempertahankan kekhasan mereka sambil tetap memeluk ajaran Islam. Proses akulturasi ini tidak hanya mendorong kerukunan sosial-keagamaan, tetapi juga membangun rasa saling menghormati dan hidup berdampingan secara damai dengan mengakomodasi adat istiadat dan kepercayaan lokal. Penelitian ini menyoroti dampak transformatif dari pendekatan Walisongo dalam menyebarluaskan Islam ke seluruh nusantara. Metode inklusif dan adaptif mereka menghasilkan identitas Islam Indonesia yang unik, yang ditandai dengan interaksi yang harmonis antara nilai-nilai Islam dengan ekspresi budaya yang beragam. Seiring dengan perkembangan lanskap agama dan budaya di Indonesia, warisan Walisongo menjadi bukti kuat akan potensi hidup berdampingan secara damai dan persatuan di tengah keragaman yang ada. Studi ini menawarkan wawasan yang berharga bagi para cendekiawan kontemporer, pembuat kebijakan, dan pemimpin agama yang ingin memahami warisan Walisongo yang abadi dan pentingnya merangkul keragaman budaya untuk kohesi dan inklusivitas masyarakat.

**Kata Kunci:** : *Islam, Walisongo, Budaya Lokal.*

## Introduction

Since prehistoric times, the inhabitants of the Indonesian archipelago have been known as reliable sailors who can sail the high seas. Since the early centuries, there have been shipping and trade routes between the Indonesian islands and the mainland of Southeast Asia. The western region of the archipelago and around Malacca has been an area of interest since ancient times, mainly because the products sold there attracted traders and became an important route between China and India.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Badri Yatim, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*, (Jakarta: Grafindo Persada, 1994), 191.

The entry of Islam into the regions of Indonesia did not happen at the same time. In the 7th to 10th centuries, the Srivijaya Empire expanded its power to Malacca and Kedah. Until the end of the 12th century, Sriwijaya's economy began to weaken. This situation was utilized by Malacca to break away from Sriwijaya until a few centuries later Islam entered various parts of the archipelago, and in the 11th century, Islam had entered the island of Java.

By the 15th century, Muslim merchants had made rapid progress in their business and proselytizing endeavors to the extent that they had networks in business towns along the North Coast. This community was spearheaded by the Walisongo who built the first mosque in Java. The Demak Mosque became a religious center that played a major role in completing the Islamization of the whole of Java.<sup>2</sup>

The Islamic archaeological evidence in inland and coastal regions discovers what is today referred to as culture is the result of Islamic culture, which expanded and developed concurrently during its heyday until the fall of the Majapahit kingdom and the rise of Demak as the first Islamic sultanate in Java.<sup>3</sup>

Studies that discuss transitional Islamic culture in Java as a whole are not widely known. The Islamization process in transitional Java has not been revealed based on adequate archaeological evidence.

The spread of Islam in Java occurred when the Majapahit kingdom collapsed followed by the establishment of the Demak kingdom. This era was a time of transition in religious, political, and cultural life. Among the followers of Islam, there was a group of religious leaders who had a high social status, they were known as Wali. This era was also known as the "kewalen" era. These saints are known in Javanese tradition as "Walisan", which is an extension of the concept of the pantheon of Hindu gods, which also numbered nine people. The nine saints who are categorized as government authorities are Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Sunan Ampel, Sunan Bonang, Sunan Drajat, Sunan Giri, Sunan Muria, Sunan Kudus, Sunan Kalijaga, and Sunan Gunung Jati.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mukhlis Paeni, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Indonesia (Religi dan Filsafat)*, (Jakarta, PT Raja Grafindo Persada, 2009), 76.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Habis Mustopo, *Kebudayaan Islam Di Jawa Timur; Kajian Beberapa Unsur Budaya Masa Peralihan* (Yogyakarta: Jendela Grafika, 2001) 3.

<sup>4</sup> Slama, Martin. "From Wali Songo to Wali Pitu: The Travelling of Islamic Saint Veneration to Bali". *In Between Harmony and Discrimination*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 25-26.

The Walisongo era also coincided with the end of the era of Hindu-Buddhist dominance in Nusantara culture to be replaced by Islamic culture. Walisongo is a symbol of the spread of Islam in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java, and of course, many other Islamic figures played a role in the spread of Islam, but their very large role in establishing Islamic kingdoms on the island of Java and their influence on the culture of the community at large and direct da'wah, making Walisongo more mentioned than others.

The Nine Saints are Maulana Malik Ibrahim is the oldest. Sunan Ampel was the son of Maulana Malik Ibrahim. Sunan Giri was the nephew of Maulana Malik Ibrahim which means he was also the cousin of Sunan Ampel. Sunan Bonang and Sunan Drajad were the sons of Sunan Ampel. Sunan Kalijaga was a friend and student of Sunan Bonang. Sunan Muria was the son of Sunan Kalijaga. Sunan Kudus was a student of Sunan Kalijaga. Sunan Gunung Jati was a friend of the other Sunans, except Maulana Malik Ibrahim who died earlier.

However, understanding Java's evolving Islamic culture is crucial. Two factors, according to Muhammad Habib Mustopo, are very significant in this Islamic civilization in transition. To start, it is important to understand how Islam was introduced to the primarily Hindu-Buddhist community, cities, and palace milieu. Second, to learn more about the pre-Islamic influences that are still visible in Islamic written literary traditions and the development of building art. The outcomes of this culture are anchored in collaborative innovation that dates back to interactions with the outside world in the fourth century.

M. Mustopo also references L.C. Damais' contention that the term "transition period" refers to either the period of official religious transition from the Hindu to the Islamic eras. And throughout that time, Islam had been formally embraced by the formal rulers (kings, officials, and kingdoms) at the core of the government or the foundation of trade. The majority of the individuals then did the same, even though some may have already done so.<sup>5</sup>

Clifford Geertz's view that the walisongo institution function as a cultural broker can be compared to that of the Guardians. In these circumstances, the Muslim population

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<sup>5</sup> Mustopo, Kebudayaan Islam, 7.

in Java, a supporter of Islamic culture, has developed its own culture, which is distinguished by a transitional era and combines elements of Islamic and pre-Islamic civilization.<sup>6</sup> The transition of Javanese people from their old beliefs to Islam is very unique. There is a process of acculturation between the teachings of Islam and the culture that has been preserved for generations by the local community. These local cultural elements still survive, and Muslim communities in various regions faithfully and consciously cling to old patterns of social behavior that can be harmonized with Islamic values. Therefore, the study of the dynamics of acculturation between Islam and Javanese local culture initiated by Walisongo is very interesting.

## Result and Discussion

### *Understanding Walisongo*

The history of walisongo is related to the spread of Islamic Da'wah in Java. The resounding success of these saints' struggle was recorded in gold ink. With full support from the sultanate of Demak Bintoro, Islam was then adopted by most Javanese people, ranging from urban, rural, and mountainous. Islam has truly become a deep-rooted religion.<sup>7</sup> Walisongo simply means nine people who have reached the level of "Wali", a high degree of being able to guard the babakan hawa sanga (guarding the nine orifices in human beings), so that they have the rank of the wali.<sup>8</sup> The saints did not live together. But they are very closely related to each other, if not by blood, then by teacher-student relationship.<sup>9</sup> Historians seem to agree that it was the Walisongo who spread Islam in Java. They were not only powerful in religious matters but also government and politics. It often seemed as if a king was only legitimate as a king if he was recognized and blessed by the Walisongo.

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<sup>6</sup> Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: the Changing Role of a Cultural Broker." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2 (1960): 228 - 249.

<sup>7</sup> Budiono Hadi Sutrisno, 1977-; Artika Maya. *Sejarah Walisongo: misi pengislaman di Jawa*/Budiono Hadi Sutrisno; editor, Artika Maya. (Yogyakarta: Graha Pustaka, 2007), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Saifullah, *Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Islam di Asia Tenggara*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010), 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> Budiono *Sejarah Walisongo*, 16.

The term wali comes from Arabic, meaning beloved, helper, and leader. Its plural form is auliya'. The Qur'an characterizes the guardians of Allah (wali) as those who believe and fear Allah. There is no fear in them nor do they grieve. Wali Songo here means a group of people (a kind of da'wah council) who are considered to have the right to teach Islam to the Islamic community in the archipelago in their day.<sup>10</sup>

The word "wali" according to the term, is a designation for Muslims who are considered sacred, spreaders of Islam, they are considered "lovers of God", people who are close to God, blessed with supernatural powers, have very excessive inner strengths, have very high knowledge, and are sakti berjaya-kewayaan. Some authors argue that the term Wali Songo comes from the Arabic word's wali and tsana' (noble), thus meaning noble guardians. Others argue that the term Wali Songo comes from the Javanese language, namely wali and sana (read: sono), which is a place. Some say that Wali Songo means nine guardians or some even say Wali Songo.

Of the various opinions, the strongest is based on the term and historical facts, namely that Wali Songo is a da'wah council, a mubaligh council, and an organization of scholars in the form of a da'wah institution of nine guardians. Every time one died or left Java, another wali was appointed as his successor so that the number remained nine.

The Wali Songo were the reformers of society in their time. Their influence was felt in various forms of manifestations of the new civilization of Javanese society ranging from commerce, shipping and fishing, farming and rice fields, medicine, culture, arts, education, and society, to issues of aqidah, politics, military, law, and government in Islamic kingdoms.

### ***The Process of Forming The Walisongo Institution***

Like Islam originating from outside the Nusantara archipelago (Arabia, Persia, Gujarat, and China), the walisongo are also descendants of the spread of early Islam, some even came directly from other countries to worship in the archipelago, especially Java. Regarding the origin of the walisongo, two theories have been put forward, namely the

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<sup>10</sup> Mas'udi, "DAKWAH NUSANTARA (Kerangka Harmonis Dakwah Walisongo dalam Diseminasi Ajaran Islam di Nusantara)", dalam kearsipan STAIN Kudus, STAIN, 2015, 286

theory of Hadramaut descent and the theory of Chinese descent. Each of these two theories also has strong evidence to confirm that Walisongo came from these countries.

## 1. Hadramaut Descent Theory

The opinion that Walisongo came from Hadramaut and is still a descendant of the Prophet Saw. was stated by Prof. Dr. H. Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (HAMKA). According to him, the teaching of Islam in the archipelago is taught directly by scholars who are descendants of the Prophet Saw. such as Syarif Hidayatullah or better known as Sunan Gunung Jati.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Sunan Gunung Jati, who is a descendant of Hadramaut is Sunan Ampel who is the son of Sheikh Ibrahim Asamarqandi. Sunan Ampel is also the grandson of the pioneer of Walisongo in Java, namely Sheikh Jumadil Kubra.<sup>12</sup> In addition to Sunan Ampel's father, Sheikh Ibrahim Asamarqandi, Sheikh Jumadil Kubra also had two sons who both also sent down guardians in Java later. They include Maulana Malik Ibrahim who spread Islam in the Gresik area and Maulana Ishaq who spread Islam in Banyuwangi. Then Maulana Ishaq had a son named Sunan Giri or Raden Paku. Sheikh Jumadil Kubro is believed to be the 10th generation of Sayyidina Hussain who is the grandson of the Holy Prophet. So, the guardians of his descendants can still be traced and continued to His Majesty the Prophet.

These evidences are also sufficient to believe and corroborate Hadramaut's theory regarding the origin of Walisongo. A Dutch Islamologist and jurist named L.W.C Van den Berg also confirmed this theory by conducting research in 1884-1886. In his book entitled *Le Hadramout et les colonies arabes dans l'archipel Indien* (1886), He said, "The real result in broadcasting Islam (to Indonesia) is from the people of Sayyid Sharif. Through their intercession, Islam spread and spread among the Hindu kings of Java and others. Apart from them, although there were also other tribes of Hadramaut (who were not the sayyid sharif group), these people did not leave such a big influence. This is because they (the Sharif sayyids) are descendants of the bearer of Islam (Prophet Muhammad)."<sup>13</sup>

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11 Rizem Aizid, *Sejarah Islam Nusantara*, (Yogyakarta: Diva Press. 2016), 139.

12 *Ibid*, 140.

13 *Ibid*, 141.

## 2. Chinese Descent Theory

In this theory, it explains that Walisongo is of Chinese descent. This theory is reinforced by an Indonesian historian named Slamet Muljana in the book *Runtuhnya Kerajaan Hindhu Jawa* (1968). He stated that Walisongo was of Chinese Indonesian descent.<sup>14</sup> Of course, seeing the facts and evidence from the theory of Hadramaut descent with the theory of Chinese descent invites a strong reaction from the public who argue that Walisongo is of Indonesian Arab descent, not Chinese.

In the book, it is explained that the original names of Walisongo smelled Chinese and were very far from the impression of Arabic. As explained in the book, one of them is Sunan Ampel where the real name of Sunan Ampel itself is Bong Swi Hoo. Then married Ni Gede Manila who turned out to be the son of Gan Eng Cu (former Chinese capital in Manila who was moved to Tuban in 1423 AD. But unfortunately, this conclusion from Slamet Muljana has many weaknesses so it is very vulnerable to input and criticism related to this.

References to the fact that wali songo came from Chinese descent are still controversial. The reference in question can only be tested through academic sources derived from Slamet Muljana, who refers to the writings of Mangaraja Onggang Parlindungan, which then refers to a person named Resident Poortman. However, Resident Poortman until now has not been able to know his identity and credibility as a historian, for example when compared to Snouck Hurgronje and L.W.C. Van Den Berg. The current Dutch historian who studies the history of Islam in Indonesia, Martin Van Bruinessen, never even once mentions Poortman's name in his books which are recognized as very detailed and widely used as references.

One of the commentaries on H.J. De Graaf, Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, M.C. Ricklefs' Chinese Muslims in Java in The 15th and 16th Centuries was written by Russell Jones. There, he doubted the existence of a Poortman. If the person exists and is not another name, it should be easily proven considering the story is quite complete in Parlindungan's writing.

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<sup>14</sup> Muljana Slamet, *Runtuhnya Kerajaan Hindhu-Jawa dan Timbulnya Negara-Negara Islam di Nusantara*, (Yogyakarta: Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 2005), 26.

The era of wali songo was the era of the end of Hindu-Buddhist dominance in Nusantara culture and was replaced with Islamic culture. They are a symbol of the spread of Islam in Indonesia, particularly in Java. Of course, many other figures also play a role. But their enormous role in establishing the Islamic Kingdom in Java, as well as their influence on the culture of the community at large and direct da'wah, made these songo saints more mentioned than other figures.

Another opinion says that wali songo is a da'wah assembly first formed by Sunan Gresik (Maulana Malik Ibrahim) in 1404 AD (808 Hijri). Wali songo was a community reformer of his time. Their influence was felt in various forms of manifestations of the new civilization of Javanese society, ranging from health, farming, commerce, culture, art, and society, to government.

### ***Walisongo and the Islamization of Java***

Islam has been spreading in Java, at least since Malik Ibrahim and Maulana Ishak, whose title was Syaikh Awal Al-Islam, were sent as missionaries by the King of Samudera, Sultan Zainal Abidin Bahiyah Syah (1349-1406) to Gresik. In the political arena, Islam began to position itself when the weakening of Majapahit power gave Islamic rulers on the coast the opportunity to establish independent centers of power. Under the leadership of Sunan Ampel, the Walisongo agreed to appoint Raden Patah as the first king of the Islamic kingdom of Demak, the first Islamic kingdom in Java.

In addition to the political power of Islam that contributed greatly to its development, Islam also lived in society and could encourage non-Muslim rulers to embrace it. Islam in Java during the Islamic kingdoms had become the religion of the people.<sup>15</sup> The Walisongo figures are:

These saints established mosques, both as places of worship and as places to teach religion. It is said that teaching religion in the foyer of this mosque is the oldest educational institution in Java which is more democratic in nature. In the early days of the development of Islam, such a system was called "gurukula", where a teacher conveyed his teachings to several students sitting in front of him, not mass or even secret as done by

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<sup>15</sup> Dedi Dupriyadi, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*, (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2008), 196-197.

Sheikh Siti Jenar. In addition to the principles of faith in Islam, worship, moral issues are also taught kanuragan, immunity, and martial arts.

Walisongo is the name of a da'wah council or missionary council. If one of the guardians leaves or dies, they will be immediately replaced by another guardian. The Walisongo era was the era of the end of Hindu-Buddhist dominance in Nusantara culture to be replaced with Islamic culture. They are a symbol of the spread of Islam in Indonesia. Especially in Java. Of course, many other figures also play a role. But their enormous role in establishing the Islamic Kingdom in Java, as well as their influence on the culture of society at large and direct proselytizing, made these "nine saints" mentioned more than others.<sup>16</sup>

These nine saints had a very important role in the spread of Islam on the island of Java in the 15th century. The role of walisongo in spreading Islam includes: 1) As a pioneer in spreading Islam to people who are not familiar with Islamic teachings in their respective regions. 2) As a fervent warrior in defending and developing Islam in his lifetime. 3) As people who are experts in the field of Islam. 4) As a person who is close to Allah SWT because he constantly worships Him, so he has more abilities. 5) As leaders of Islam in their respective distribution areas, which have a considerable number of followers among the Islamic community. 6) As a teacher of the Islamic religion who persistently teaches Islam to his students. 7) As a Kiai who mastered the teachings of Islam quite widely. 8) As a respected Islamic community figure during his lifetime. The pioneering struggle of the nine saints made Islam spread throughout the island of Java and even to all regions in the Nusantara islands.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Acculturation of Islam and Local Culture by Walisongo***

#### **1. The Acculturation Method**

The success of the Walisongo in preaching Islam is certainly inseparable from the methods they apply in the implementation in the field. The method is acculturation between Islam and Local Culture. In general, it can be said that the method of da'wah of

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<sup>16</sup> PaEni, *Sejarah Kebudayaan Indonesia*, 128-129.

<sup>17</sup> "Peranan Walisongo dalam penyebaran agama islam", <http://id.shvoong.com/humanities/history/2183822-peranan-walisongo-dalam-penyebaran-agama/#ixzz2Qgi7upKQ>. (diakses pada 20 Juli 2023).

the Walisongo is inseparable from this method used by them in special figures such as leaders of prominent and prominent people in society, such as regents, dukes, kings, or facing other nationalities. The method of al-hikmah as a system and way of preaching to the saints is a path of wisdom that is held popularly, attractively, and sensationaly. This method they use in dealing with ordinary society. In a very wise manner, they faced the common people en masse.

In this series of acculturation, we find, for example, Sunan Kalijaga with his *Sekaten gamelan*. At the suggestion of Sunan Kalijaga, a crowd was made with his *Sekaten gamelan* (two kalimah key witnesses of Islam), which was held in the grand mosque by hitting gamelan which was very unique in terms of song performance and instrumental composition that were prevalent at that time. Some other important methods applied by the walisongo to implement the acculturation are:

a) Formation and cultivation of cadres, as well as the deployment of preachers to various regions; b) Conveying the teachings of Islam through family/marriage channels. Sunan Ampel for example, his daughter named Dewi Murthosiyah, married Raden Patah (Regent of Demak), and Sunan Ampel's daughter named 'Alawiyah' married Syarif Hidayatullah (Sunan Gunung Jati); c) Developing pesantren education which was first pioneered by Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim is a model of Islamic education that takes the form of monastic and dormitory education used by priests and monks in teaching and learning; d) Developing Javanese culture. In Javanese culture, Walisongo contributed a very large part. Not only in education and teaching but also extends to the fields of entertainment, busy arrangements (free time barriers), arts, and other aspects; e) Paying more attention to facilities and infrastructure related to people's economic problems. For example, for efficiency in the economy, the guardians are *ijtihad* about the perfection of agricultural tools, kitchen furniture, and glassware; f) Take advantage of the path of power. An example of this method is the process of establishing the Demak mosque. This mosque is a mosque jointly established by the saints as their da'wah center. Demak Mosque is a palace mosque whose management is directly under the control of the reigning sultan. Thus, it can be said that the center of walisongo da'wah is not in the place of one wali or each guardian but in the center of political power in the palace.

## 2. Application of Methods by Walisongo

### ***Sunan Gresik (Syekh Maulana Malik Ibrahim)***

Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim came from Turkey, he was an accomplished expert in governance. Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim came to Java in 1404 AD. Long before he came, Islam already existed although a little, this is evidenced by the existence of the tomb of Fatimah bint Maimun whose gravestone reads the year 1082.<sup>18</sup>

Among the common people, Sunan Gresik or often called Grandfather Pillow was very famous, especially among the lower castes who were always oppressed by the higher castes. Sunan Gresik explained that in Islam the position of all people is equal, only those who have faith and piety have a higher position with Allah. He established an Islamic boarding school, a place to educate and train students as future preachers.

In Gresik, he also gave direction so that the level of life of the people of Gresik would increase. He had the idea of draining water from the mountain to irrigate rice fields and fields. Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim is a walisongo who is considered the father of the walisongo. He died in Gresik in 882 H or 1419 AD.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Sunan Ampel (Raden Rahmat)***

Raden Rahmat was the son of Sheikh Maulana Malik Ibrahim from his wife Dewi Candrawulan. He began his activities by establishing a boarding school in Ampel Denta, close to Surabaya. Among the young men he educated were Raden Paku (Sunan Giri), Raden Fatah (the first Sultan of the Islamic Sultanate of Bintoro, Demak), Raden Makdum Ibrahim (son of Sunan Ampel himself and known as Sunan Bonang), Syarifuddin (Sunan Drajat), and Maulana Ishak.

According to Babad Diponegoro, Sunan Ampel was very influential in the Majapahit court, even his wife came from the court Raden Fatah, son of Prabu Brawijaya, King of Majapahit, became Ampel's student. Sunan Ampel is recorded as the designer of the Islamic Kingdom on the island of Java. It was he who appointed Raden Fatah as the first sultan of Demak. In addition, Sunan Ampel also co-founded the Great Mosque of Demak in 1479 with other saints.

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<sup>18</sup>Abu Su'ud, *Islamologi (Sejarah Ajaran dan Peranannya dalam Peradaban Umat Manusia)*, (Jakarta: PT Rineka Cipta, 2003), 125.

<sup>19</sup>Abu Su'ud, *Islamologi*, 194.

At the beginning of the Islamization of Java, Sunan Ampel wanted the people to follow a pure faith. He did not agree that community customs such as kenduri, selamatian, offerings, and so on should remain in the socio-cultural system of people who had embraced Islam. But the other guardians argued that for the time being all these customs should be left as it was difficult for the people to abandon them simultaneously. Finally, Sunan Ampel appreciated it. This can be seen from his agreement when Sunan Kalijaga, in his efforts to attract Hindus and Buddhists, proposed that the Javanese customs be given an Islamic color. He died in 1478 and was buried next to the Ampel mosque.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Sunan Bonang (Raden Makdum Ibrahim)***

His real name is Raden Makdum Ibrahim. He was the son of Sunan Ampel. Sunan Bonang is famous as an expert in the science of kalam and tawhid. He is considered the first composer of music to develop the teachings of Islam on the north coast of East Java. After studying in Pasai, Aceh, Sunan Bonang returned to Tuban, East Java, to establish a boarding school. His students came from all over the region. Sunan Bonang and the other saints in spreading Islam always adapted to the cultural style of the Javanese people who were very fond of wayang and gamelan music. They utilized these traditional performances as a medium for preaching Islam, by inserting the breath of Islam into them. The verses of gamelan songs created by the guardians contain the message of monotheism, the attitude of worshiping Allah SWT and not associating partners with Him. Each stanza of the song is punctuated with a syahadatain (utterance of the two sentences of the creed); the gamelan that accompanies it is now known as sekaten, which comes from syahadatain. Sunan Bonang himself composed a song known as tembang Durma, a type of macapat that depicts a tense, violent, and angry atmosphere. Sunan Bonang died on the island of Bawean in 1525 AD.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Sunan Giri (Raden Paku)***

Sunan Giri was the son of Maulana Ishak and his mother was Dewi Sekardadu, son of Menak Samboja. Sunan Giri's greatness can be seen among other things as a member

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 195.

<sup>21</sup>Fatah Syukur, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*, (Semarang : PT. Pustaka Rizki Putra, 2010), 196.

of the Walisongo council. Sunan Giri's name cannot be separated from the process of establishing the first Islamic kingdom in Java, Demak. He was the wali who actively participated in planning the establishment of the state and was involved in the attack on Majapahit as a military advisor.<sup>22</sup>

Sunan Giri or Raden Paku was known to be very generous, distributing merchandise to the people of Banjar who were in distress. He once meditated in a quiet cave for 40 days and 40 nights to pray to God. After his meditation, he remembered his father's message while studying in Pasai to look for an area with land similar to that under him from Pasai through the village of Margonoto until Raden Paku arrived at the border area where the weather was cool, then he established an Islamic boarding school called Pesantren Giri. Within three years the boarding school was famous throughout the archipelago. Sunan Giri was instrumental in spreading Islam both in Java and the archipelago either by himself as a young man through trading or with his students. He also created Islamic songs for children, such as jamuran, jelungan, bendi gerit, gula ganti, cublak suweng, lir-ilir, and others.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Sunan Drajat (Raden Qasim)***

Sunan Drajat was the youngest son of Sunan Ampel with Dewi Condrowati or often referred to as Nyi Ageng Manila. He was born in 1450. Another famous name for Sunan Drajat is Raden Qasim. In the village of Jelak, Raden Qasim established a surau and Islamic boarding school. Many people came to study Islam with him so Jelak became more crowded and developed into a large village. Therefore, the name Jelak was later changed to Banjaranyar. He introduced Islam through the concept of da'wah bil-hikam, in wise ways and without force. In his delivery, he took five ways. First through direct recitation in the mosque or the langgar. Second through education in pesantren. Third giving fatwa or advice in solving problems. The fourth is through traditional arts and the fifth is conveying religious teachings through traditional rituals as long as they do not conflict with Islam.

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<sup>22</sup>Ridin Sofwan, dkk, *Islamisasi Islam di Jawa Walisongo, Penyebar Islam di Jawa, Menurut Penuturan Babad*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), 65.

<sup>23</sup>Syukur, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*, 198.

Sunan Drajat also preached using Javanese art which at that time was ingrained among the people. One of the songs he created was the Mijil song. Sunan Drajat was also famous for his teachings that said, “*paring teken marang kang kalunyon lan wuto, paring pangan marang kang kalirenen, paring sandhang marang kang kudanan*” (giving a cane to the blind, feeding the hungry, clothing the unclothed and giving an umbrella to the rain-soaked.). This is indeed the core of social teaching in Islam that will remain relevant forever.

At the end of Majapahit, there was a social, economic, and political crisis. Sunan Drajat became a spokesman who defended the oppressed people. He criticized the actions of the political elite who at that time only pursued power for personal enjoyment. In the field of literary culture, he created: 1) Participated in the construction of the Demak mosque. 2) Assisting Raden Patah. 3) Tembang (song) Pangkur.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Sunan Kalijaga (Raden Sahid)***

His real name was Raden Sahid, the son of Raden Sahur, the son of Temanggung Wilatika, the Duke of Tuban. Raden Sahid was a young man who was obedient and strong to religion and his parents but could not accept the situation around him where there was a lot of inequality, so he looked for food from the Duchy warehouse and distributed it to his people. But his father found out, so he was punished by having his hands slapped 100 times until he bled a lot and was expelled. After being expelled and wandering, he met a man in a white robe, who was Sunan Bonang. Then Raden Sahid was appointed as a disciple, then told to wait for his stick in front of the river for months until his whole body was mossy. Raden Sahid was then called Sunan Kalijaga.

Sunan Kalijaga used the arts to spread Islam, including puppetry, literature, and various other arts. The arts approach was used by the spreaders of Islam such as Walisongo to attract attention among them so that they were unknowingly attracted to the teachings of Islam even though they were initially attracted because of the arts media. For example, Sunan Kalijaga was a puppet artist. He never asked the audience to follow him in reciting the creed. Some of the puppets were still drawn from the Mahabharata

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<sup>24</sup> Hasanu Simon, *Misteri Syekh Siti Jenar*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), 232-234.

and Ramayana stories, but in the stories were inserted religious teachings and the names of Islamic heroes.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Sunan Kudus (Ja'far Sadiq)***

Sunan Kudus spread Islam in the Kudus area and its surroundings. He had special expertise in religion, especially in fiqh, tawhid, hadith, tafsir, and logic. For this reason, among the walisongo, he was the only one who received the nickname wali al-'ilm (wali of vast knowledge), and because of his vast knowledge, he was visited by many knowledge seekers from various regions in the archipelago.

There is a story that Sunan Kudus studied in Baitul Maqdis, Palestine, and was instrumental in eradicating a disease that claimed many victims in Palestine. For his services, the Palestinian government gave him a diploma of territory in Palestine, but Sunan Kudus expected the gift to be transferred to Java, and the Amir (local ruler) granted his request. Upon his return to Java, he built a mosque in the Loran area in 1549, the mosque was named Masjid Al-Aqsa or Al-Manar (Masjid Menara Kudus), and the surrounding area was renamed Kudus, taken from the name of a city in Palestine, al-Quds. In carrying out da'wah with a cultural approach, Sunan Kudus created various religious stories. The most famous are *Gending Makumambang* and *Mijil*.<sup>26</sup> The ways of preaching Sunan Kudus are as follows:

- a. Mass engagement strategy with methods: a) Allowing old customs that are difficult to change; b) Avoiding confrontation in preaching Islam; c) which is a message for every educator not to impose their will on their students. That is, do not try to pull students from the front. Children who are still learning should be left to find their way. If the students go the wrong way, then the educator can direct them; d) Parts of customs that are incompatible with them are easily changed directly.
- b. Respect the Hindu community by not slaughtering cows because in Hinduism cows are sacred and sacred animals.
- c. Respect the Budha community. After building the mosque, Sunan Kudus then built a place of ablution (padasan) with eight showers. On top of the shower is given a statue

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<sup>25</sup>Samsul Munir, *Sejarah Peradaban Islam*, (Jakarta: Amzah, 2010), 308.

<sup>26</sup>Ricklefs, M.C. *A History of Modern Indonesia since c.1300*, 2nd Edition. (London: MacMillan, 1991). 9–10.

of the head of Kebo Gumarang. The laying of this statue is following Buddhist teachings, namely "the eightfold path or *asta sunghika marga*".

d. Selamatatan (ceremony) Mitoni

Mitoni is a traditional life cycle ceremony, which is still often found in Javanese society. This ceremony is to express gratitude, when the fetus in the womb is 7 months old. The tradition of 7 monthly pregnant celebrations has existed for a long time on the island of Java, and there are also different terms for calling this traditional ceremony. Usually, this ceremony is celebrated by the reading of the mawlid of the prophet Muhammad. Sunan Kudus died in 1550 AD and was buried in Kudus. On the door of Kanjeng Sunan Kudus dining is engraved the sentence *asmaul husna* which is numbered 1296 H or 1878 AD.<sup>27</sup>

***Sunan Muria (Raden Umar Said)***

Sunan Muria was the first son of Sunan Kalijaga with Dewi Saroh bint Maulana Ishak. His real name is Raden Umar Said, while his given name is Raden Prawoto. In preaching, Sunan Muria imitated the way his father had done successfully, namely using Javanese musical instruments (gamelan). The target worked on by Sunan Muria is people who live in rural areas, far from the center of government and the city. Therefore, Sunan Muria built a pesantren on the slopes of Mount Muria, and that's why the title Sunan Muria was given by the community.<sup>28</sup>

He was the son of Sunan Kalijaga with Dewi Saroh. His real name is Raden Umar Said, in preaching he is like his father, which uses a subtle way, like taking fish not to turbid the water. Muria in spreading Islam. The targets of his preaching were merchants, fishermen, and commoners. He was the only saint who defended the art of gamelan and wayang as a means of da'wah and he was also the one who created Sinom and Kinanthi songs. He filled many Javanese traditions with Islamic nuances such as nelung dino, mitung dino, ngatus dino, and so on. Through the songs he created, Sunan Muria invited his people to practice the teachings of Islam. Therefore, Sunan Muria preferred to preach to the common people rather than the nobility. This way of da'wah is what causes Sunan

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<sup>27</sup>Sutrisno, *Sejarah Walisongo*, 130.

<sup>28</sup> Sumanto Al-Qurtuby, *Arus Cina-Islam-Jawa*, (Yogyakarta: Inspeal Ahimsakarya Press, 2003), 258.

Muria to be known as Sunan who likes to *preach tapa ngeli*, which is to immerse himself in society.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Sunan Gunung Jati (Syarif Hidayatullah)***

His real name is Syarif Hidayatullah, he was born in Makkah. Many versions tell about the existence of Sunan Gunungjati, but the famous story is about the marriage of Sunan Gunungjati to a Chinese princess named Ong Tien, who was later renamed Nyai Ratu Rara Semanding. Sunan Gunung Jati did have a good relationship with the Chinese emperor. To establish good relations, in 1479 he visited China and met with the emperor Hong Gie, and became acquainted with royal secretaries named Ma Huan, General Ceng Ho, and Fei Hsin. Here Sunan Gunungjati opened a medical practice, and many Chinese people treated him. This opportunity was used as well as possible by him to preach.

After finishing his studies in 1470 he went to Java to practice his knowledge. There he and his mother were welcomed happily by the prince of Cakra Buana. Syarifah Mudain asked to be allowed to live in Gunung Jati donation and there they built a pesantren to continue their business, Syeh Datuk Latif, his teacher, Prince Cakra Buana. Therefore Syarif Hidayatullah is called sunan gunung Jati. Then he was married to the princess of Cakra Buana Nyi Pakung Wati then he was appointed prince of Cakra Buana in 1479 with his appointment as prince of Islamic da'wah carried out through diplomacy with other kingdoms. After Cirebon was officially established as an Islamic Kingdom free from Pajajaran rule, Sunan Gunung Jati tried to influence the kingdom that had not embraced Islam. From Cirebon, he expanded Islam to other areas in West Java, such as Majalengka, Kuningan, Kawali (Galuh), Sunda Kelapa, and Banten. Sunan Gunungjati built a mosque in 1480 which was named the Great Mosque of Sang Ciptarasa. The construction of this mosque received full assistance from the Sultan of Demak and Walisongo. It is even said that Sunan Kalijogo donated a tatal pole. This mosque is also often used as a meeting center for Walisongo to discuss problems faced at that time.<sup>30</sup>

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>29</sup> Sutrisno, *Sejarah Walisongo*, 137-138.

<sup>30</sup> Al Qurtuby, *Arus Cina-Islam-Jawa*, 252.

The interaction between Islam and local cultures has led to a distinct Indonesian Islamic identity through a unique process of acculturation. This conclusion synthesizes key findings from Islamic studies, highlighting the impact of the Walisongo's approach on Islam's integration with Indonesia's local cultures. Historically, Indonesia's diversity encompassed animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and indigenous beliefs during the Walisongo era. Employing an inclusive strategy, the Walisongo adapted Islamic teachings to local norms, languages, and traditions. This approach facilitated Islam's gradual acceptance and harmonious blend with local customs.

The Walisongo recognized the need to make Islamic teachings accessible to local communities. They effectively employed local languages, arts, and customs, bridging understanding between Islam and Indonesia's varied cultures and promoting unity. This cultural exchange produced distinct local Islamic traditions. By merging Islamic practices with existing rituals, new syncretic worship forms emerged. An example is the use of the wayang kulit shadow puppet theater in Javanese culture to convey Islamic values alongside traditional stories, showcasing the coexistence of beliefs. The acculturation process also preserved local identity and heritage. Rather than erasing indigenous beliefs, the Walisongo integrated them into Islamic practices, allowing communities to retain their uniqueness while embracing Islamic principles.

Socio-religious harmony flourished as a result of this process. By respecting local customs, the Walisongo gained credibility and trust, reducing conflicts between Islam and cultural practices and fostering peaceful coexistence. This research underscores the transformative influence of the Walisongo's approach in spreading Islam throughout Indonesia. Their inclusive methods assimilated Islamic teachings into local cultures, forging a distinct Indonesian Islamic identity. The process preserved traditions and birthed new worship forms, reflecting the harmonious blend of Islamic values with diverse cultures. Crucially, the Walisongo's efforts bolstered socio-religious harmony, highlighting Islam's adaptability within various cultural contexts. Contemporary scholars, policymakers, and religious leaders can draw insights from this study. The Walisongo's legacy emphasizes the significance of embracing cultural diversity, fostering inclusivity and unity amid Indonesia's religious and cultural tapestry. As Indonesia navigates these

dynamics, the Walisongo's approach remains a testament to peaceful coexistence and unity amidst diversity.

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