

ACCULTURATION OF RELIGION AND CULTURE WITHIN MUSLIM SUNDANESE SOCIETY IN WEST JAVA

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the acculturation of culture and religion, focusing on the interaction between Islam and Sundanese culture in West Java, Indonesia. Early Islamic preachers employed accommodating strategies, integrating pre-existing cultural elements, which led to the development of a unique form of Islam in the region. The purpose of this article is to examine and highlight the ways in which Islam has blended with Sundanese culture in West Java. The study utilized a qualitative research approach, combining field research with data from both primary sources (observations and interviews) and secondary sources, such as books, scholarly articles, research reports, and other relevant materials. The data were displayed in a narrative-descriptive format and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis techniques including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the long-standing process of acculturation between Islam and Sundanese culture in West Java has produced a distinct Sundanese culture influenced by Islamic principles. This is evident in elements

such as the wawacan texts, which contain Islamic teachings, the prevalence of Islamic boarding schools, the practice of Islamic mysticism (Sufism-Tariqa), and the unique Islamic-Sundanese architectural style. The widespread acceptance of Islamic teachings among the Sundanese has led to the incorporation of these principles and traditions into Sundanese society, aligning them closely with Islamic values.

Keywords: Acculturation; Islam; Sundanese Culture; West Java

INTRODUCTION

In their daily lives, humans are deeply intertwined with the culture that naturally forms from habitual practices. Both culture and religion hold unique and significant places in human life. Islam, as a universal religion, offers teachings that are beneficial for life and the entire universe, bringing blessings to all creation. However, the relationship between culture and religion is not always straightforward. While there are times when culture and religion can easily blend, leading to mutual support and complementarity, there are also instances where the two clash, leading to conflicts (Sumpena, 2012). One of the factors contributing to the emergence of religion in society is the presence of a power perceived as immense by humans. This curiosity drives people to learn more about this great power and seek to understand its source. Additionally, humans often believe in supernatural forces. When misunderstood, natural phenomena such as those occurring in the sky, mountains, or seas can astonish people, leading them to worship this great power (Bauto, 2014).

Culture originates from the human soul, particularly through feelings and thoughts. Culture also represents the essence of an individual, reflecting how they express their feelings and thoughts in every aspect of their lives. Culture encompasses various areas of human existence, both spiritual and physical (Fitriyani, 2012). Humans live within communities that establish guidelines and rules, creating a sense of peace, tranquility, and security. These rules or norms can be cultural or religious. In indigenous communities, there are specific rules and norms upheld by all members, primarily designed to protect society and preserve nature. By fostering a healthy environment, these communities safeguard themselves against various forms of harm and disaster. This phenomenon is fascinating to study, as every society inherently embodies cultural values. Communities with distinctive characteristics are often referred to as indigenous communities. These groups pass down traditions from generation to generation, including religious practices, life conceptions, and cultural values, which are preserved and maintained as vital aspects of life (Miharja, 2016). During the process of Islamization, there has been significant

acculturation, assimilation, and transformation of Islamic teachings and traditions into the social and cultural fabric of these communities (Busni et al., 2022). Thus, there exists a mutual support system between religion and culture, where both influence and enrich each other.

Previous studies on the acculturation of religion and culture, particularly the interaction between Islam and Sundanese culture, have been extensively conducted. Several key studies in this area include: First, *Tradisi Budaya Masyarakat Islam di Tatar Sunda (Jawa Barat)* [Traditions of Islamic Culture in the Community of Tatar Sunda (West Java)] (Budi Sujati, 2019) examines Sundanese culture through the lens of Islamic law. Second, *Islam dan Budaya Lokal: Studi tentang Interelasi Islam dan Budaya Sunda* [Islam and Local Culture: A Study of the Interrelation between Islam and Sundanese Culture] (Deden Sumpena, 2012) explores the Sundanese Islamic school of thought. Third, *Sastra Islam Nusantara: Guguritan Sunda dalam Tradisi Keilmuan Islam di Jawa Barat* [Islamic Literature of the Indonesian Archipelago: The Sundanese *Guguritan* within Islamic Scientific Tradition in West Java] (Jajang A. Rohmana, 2016) discusses the use of *Guguritan* as a medium for expressing Islamic scholarly creativity. While these studies demonstrate the extensive research on the acculturation between Islam and Sundanese culture, they have not specifically focused on analyzing this acculturation within the context of West Java using acculturation theory and exploring the specific forms of acculturation that have emerged.

This article seeks to address the research question: How does the acculturation of culture and religion manifest, particularly in the context of Islam and Sundanese culture in West Java? The introduction of new cultural elements has the potential to enrich and add diversity to Sundanese society. Although numerous studies have examined the acculturation of culture and religion, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between Islam and Sundanese culture in West Java. This research employs a qualitative fieldwork approach, as it relies on qualitative data (Sugiyono, 2013). Qualitative data refers to information that is not numerical or statistical but is instead composed of thoughts, understandings, and narratives expressed in meaningful ways to achieve a comprehensive analysis and draw conclusions. The focus of this research is on the interaction between Islam and local Sundanese culture in West Java. Data for this study were collected from two main sources. First, field data were obtained through observations and interviews. Second, additional data were gathered from library sources, including books, scholarly articles, research reports, and other relevant materials. The findings are presented in a narrative-descriptive format, which involves narrating or

describing the results of the analysis based on the collected sources. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentary studies. The data analysis technique used is the qualitative analysis method developed by Miles et al., which includes data condensation, where relevant data are selected from field notes and other sources; data presentation, where the collected and analyzed data are displayed; and conclusion drawing, where findings are verified and conclusions are formed based on the evidence (Miles et al., 2014).

THE ARRIVAL OF ISLAM IN SUNDA REGION

Cultural acculturation is a significant reality in Indonesia (Purwaningsih & Witro, 2020). The process of religious and cultural acculturation involves the development and introduction of Islam into Indonesia, which is now widely embraced by its people. For instance, the Islamization of Java was led by the Wali Sanga, who employed a cultural approach by incorporating Hindu-Buddhist traditions, making it easier for Islam to be accepted by the archipelago's inhabitants (Laili et al., 2021). Understanding the development and history of Islam's entry into Indonesia requires examining the theories about its introduction to Southeast Asia, particularly the Indonesian archipelago.

The process of Islamization in the archipelago, particularly in the Sunda region, occurred through cultural channels, meaning that Islam interacted with the local traditions of the Tatar Sunda area. These local traditions, shaped by regional influences, were also impacted by Islamic teachings, resulting in a significant cultural shift. This interaction led to the development of a culture where community customs, passed down through generations, incorporated elements of both local traditions and Islamic practices.

Ali Puad Nasrullah, a cultural figure from Ciamis, explained as follows: "Islam and Sundanese culture are closely connected through their teachings. Sundanese teachings emphasize the importance of environmental stewardship and the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Similarly, Islam promotes the concept of *rahmatan lil alamin* (a mercy to all creation), which aligns with Sundanese teachings and has become a shared belief in the community. This shared foundation made Islamic teachings more acceptable to the Sundanese people, as there are similarities between their traditional beliefs and Islamic principles. For example, the Sundanese concept of *Hyang*, the creator of all things, parallels the Islamic belief in Allah as the one true God. Moreover, Islam's acceptance among the Sundanese was facilitated by its peaceful introduction through cultural integration and Sufism, focusing on moral guidance rather than conflict or violence" (Nasrullah,

interviewed on 20 November 2022).

Asep Muhyiddin, a Religious Studies expert from UIN Bandung, remarked: “Sundanese culture and Islamic law are closely intertwined, particularly in the realm of *muamalah* (social interactions). Culture, as a product of human creativity, and Islam, as a moral framework, intersect in shaping a society that maintains its identity. This convergence has led to the concept of *Islam teh Sunda, Sunda teh Islam* [Islam is Sunda, Sunda is Islam]. This term highlights the integration of Sundanese culture with Islamic teachings, reflecting the *ijtihad* [independent reasoning] of early Islamic preachers during the Islamization of the Tatar Sunda region” (Muhyiddin, interviewed on 20 November 2022).

Based on the interview results, it is evident that Islam can acculturate with local traditions, leading to the emergence of a new tradition known as local genius (local community intelligence or local wisdom) (Witro et al., 2021). This local genius can absorb and selectively integrate influences from foreign cultures, resulting in unique and novel creations that differ from previous forms. The characteristics of local genius include the ability to accommodate elements of foreign cultures, resist cultural impositions, integrate foreign elements into the original culture, and guide and manage cultural development on a broader scale. Regarding the process of introduction Islam to Tatar Sunda or West Java, Edi S. Ekajati’s research outlines four stages: conversion, intensification, actualization, and reform (Ekajati, 2013).

The first stage is conversion, which began with the arrival of the first Muslims in Tatar Sunda or West Java. According to local tradition recorded by J. Hageman, the first person to convert to Islam in West Java was Haji Purwa (Ekajati, 2013). The *Parahiyangan* story manuscript reveals that before his conversion, Haji Purwa was known as Bratalegawa, the second son of Sang Bunisora, also known as Prabu Guru Pangandiparamarta Jayadewabrata, who was the ruler of the Galuh kingdom. As a prominent merchant, Bratalegawa frequently traveled to Sumatra, India, China, Iran, Sri Lanka, and even Arab countries. He eventually married a Muslim woman and converted to Islam. After his conversion, he observed the Islamic pillars, including performing the Hajj pilgrimage, and was given the title Haji Baharudin. Among the Galuh community, he is more commonly known as Haji Purwa (Ripa’i, 2012). Other sources indicate that he arrived in 1250 Javanese year, or 1337 AD, traveling from Cirebon Girang to Galuh. He was the son of Prabu Kuda Lelean from Galuh and converted to Islam during a trading trip to India, where he was converted by Arab traders (Ekajati, 2013).

On the other hand, according to Prince Arya Cirebon in the Carita Purwa

Caruban Nagari (1720), the first Muslim to arrive and settle in Tatar Sunda was Sheikh Qura, also known as Sheikh Hasanudin. He was the son of Sheikh Yusuf Sidiq, a renowned cleric from Campa. Sheikh Qura became a Quran teacher in the Karawang area and introduced Islam to Nyi Subanglarang, the daughter of Jumajanti, who was known for her support of Sheikh Qura, who ruled the port of Muhara Djati. Nyi Subanglarang later married Prabu Siliwangi, the King of Padjadjaran (Ekajati, 2013, p. 78). According to Prince Arya Cirebon, other Islamic scholars also settled in Amparan Djati, including Sheikh Nuruljati, also known as Datuk Sheikh Kahfi or Sheikh Idhopi. He came from Arabia as an envoy of the King of Persia and was the teacher of Wagulungsang, the son of Nyi Subanglarang and Prabu Siliwangi. Wagulungsang played a key role in the development of Cirebon around 1445 (Ekajati, 2013).

Before Sheikh Qura arrived in Karawang, West Java had already been visited by many Muslim traders from Persia, Arabia, and India. However, the process of Islamization was not yet widespread and was primarily limited to trade. It wasn't until the military expeditions from Demak and Cirebon that the people in the ports of Banten, Sunda Kelapa, and surrounding areas became more deeply acquainted with Islam between 1526 and 1527. In 1528, Sunan Gunung Djati began efforts to introduce Islam to the interior regions of Tatar Sunda, including Kuningan, Sindangkasih, Talaga, Luragung, Ukur, Cibalagung, Pagadingan, Indralaya, Batulayang, and Timbanganten. This effort was continued by subsequent figures, such as Prince Makhdum in East Ciamis, Sheikh Abdul Muhyi in Pamijahan (South Tasikmalaya), Prince Santri in Sumedang, Aria Wangsa Goparana in Subang, and Aria Wiratanudatar in Cianjur (Ekajati, 2013).

Farid Maul, a cleric from Garut, explained why Islamic teachings were readily accepted by the Sundanese people:

He highlighted three key factors: First, the simplicity of Islamic teachings—covering aspects of faith, worship, and morals—resonated with the straightforward lifestyle of the Sundanese. Second, Islam was introduced through cultural exchanges from the East (Arabia, Persia, and India), which the Sundanese were already familiar with due to long-standing trade relations. Third, many of the early Islamic missionaries were descendants of influential figures, such as Randen Kian Santang, Sheikh Syarif Hidayatullah, Maulana Hasanudin, and Sheikh Qura. Their high social status and power facilitated the spread of Islam, making it easier for the Sundanese to accept the religion, often unconsciously, due to the authority and social hierarchy of these figures. (Maul, Interview, 21 November 2022).

Meanwhile, in the Banten region, intensive efforts to spread Islam took place during the reign of the Banten Sultanate under Sultan Hasanudin (1528-1570), affecting both the coastal and inland areas. In Bogor, which was then the capital of the Sunda Kingdom, Islam was introduced by Maulana Yusuf, the son of Sultan Hasanudin. He sent Islamic troops from Banten to occupy the capital of Pakuan Padjadjaran. The second stage is intensification. This phase began when Sheikh Syarif Hidayatullah, also known as Sunan Gunung Djati, established a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Bukit Sembung, Cirebon, where he taught Islam to the first generation of students. These students later became the first generation of scholars, who established their own centers for the spread of Islam in various regions of West Java, such as Sheikh Abdul Muhyi in Pamijahan Tasikmalaya, Prince Makhdum in Dayeuh Luhur, and Aria Wangsa Goparana in Subang. Additionally, Sunan Gunung Djati intensified Islamization in West Java through various means, including marriages, forging friendships and alliances with neighboring regions, sending religious teachers to the interior of Sunda, and establishing Islamic rule through political channels by founding sultanates like Banten and Cirebon (Ekajati, 2013).

The third stage is actualization. This stage is characterized by the establishment of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), which serve as centers for educating the younger generation of Muslims. These institutions aim to equip students with religious knowledge and instill a lifestyle aligned with Islamic teachings. While the foundations for this activity were laid during the time of Susuhunan Gunung Djati, it wasn't until the 18th century AD that the establishment of *pesantren* became more widespread and intensive (Ekajati, 2013). This expansion was partly influenced by the increasing Dutch presence in Islamic territories. In Cirebon and Banten, for instance, *pesantren* were established by figures like Kiai Asyrafuddin in Sumedang and Kiai Muqoyyim in East Cirebon (1773 AD). By the 19th century, these institutions also played a role in the growing resistance to Dutch colonialism. The fourth stage is reform. This period was marked by the emergence of various Sufi orders, such as Syatariyyah, Qadiriyyah, and Naqshbandiyyah, in the 19th century. New ideas were also introduced by organizations, such as Syarikat Islam, Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, the Islamic Association, and the Islamic Community Association. These developments sparked a renewed sense of enthusiasm and vitality among Muslims in West Java.

FORMS OF ACCULTURATION OF ISLAM AND SUNDANESE CULTURE

Acculturation is a two-way interaction between cultures, where each influences the other, leading to changes in both. Acculturation as the phenomena that arise from the interaction of different cultures is as cultural change resulting from prolonged contact between cultures (Widiana, 2017). Cultural change in a region often occurs when a foreign or new culture is introduced (Ilahi et al., 2022; Latifah et al., 2021). Acculturation happens when a cultural group encounters a foreign culture and gradually incorporates elements of that culture into its own while still preserving its original identity (Kadir, 2019). However, some argue that this cultural blending can obscure the original culture to the point where it becomes unrecognizable. Acculturation can manifest in various forms, such as through language, technology, science, and art (Manu, 2018), as a result of sustained intercultural contact (Thaumaet & Soebijantoro, 2019). This process involves careful selection and absorption of foreign cultural elements, which takes time and eventually leads to the formation of a new, hybrid culture (Manu, 2018). The spread of Islam in Indonesia, for example, occurred peacefully and involved significant accommodation and acculturation with local cultures (Witro et al., 2022), which helped create the tradition of *ummatan wasathan* (a balanced community). This may explain why Islam was so readily accepted in Indonesia, leading to its status as a predominantly Muslim country (Rasidin et al., 2023; Suprianto et al., 2021).

In addition to influencing the beliefs of individuals and communities in Tatar Sunda, Islamic teachings also brought about social and cultural changes to the longstanding traditions of the Sundanese people. The integration of Islamic customs and laws often resulted in a blend of Islam with pre-existing beliefs. This is understandable, as the early spreaders of Islam employed a strategy of accommodating local traditions, taking into account the religious systems that were already in place. The first through fourth centuries of the Hijri calendar, beginning in the 7th century AD, marked the initial phase of Muslim traders arriving in coastal areas and ports throughout the archipelago (Taufiq, 2013). According to Wildan, the encounter and subsequent acculturation of Islamic teachings with Sundanese culture can be categorized into three distinct forms:

First, there is a distinct separation between the adherents of the *Sunda Wiwitan* teachings and the Sundanese Muslim community. When Islam entered the Pakuan Padjadjaran Kingdom, the *Sunda Wiwitan* community withdrew into the secluded area of Kanekes, creating a unique, insular community. This separation is evident in the stories of *budak buncireung*, *dewa kaladri*, and *pantun Bogor* of Aki Buyut Baju Rambeng version, as depicted in the

Padjadjaran Seureun Papan play. The Kanekes community, with full awareness, acknowledges the differences between their religious system and that of the Sundanese Muslim communities outside Kanekes, though they still consider themselves ethnically Sundanese. According to Djati Sunda, the Sundanese people outside Kanekes are referred to as “Sundanese Eslam,” or Sundanese who are Muslim (Taufiq, 2013).

Second, the encounter between Islam and Sundanese culture led to the emergence of new beliefs, such as the Madrais teachings developed in Cigugur, Kuningan Regency. Madrais, originally rooted in Islamic tradition, evolved into a new teaching that blended Islamic principles with pre-Islamic agrarian beliefs of the Sundanese people. Known as the Sundanese-Javanese teaching or Madraism, this belief system was formalized in 1921. It established the 1st of Syuro as a major day of celebration, known as *seren taun*, which was widely observed. The teachings revered Dewi Sri, the goddess of rice, and simultaneously honored the Prophet Muhammad’s birthday while rejecting the Qur’an, based on the belief that the authentic Qur’an would only be revealed before the Judgment Day. After Madrais’ death in 1939, his son, Prince Tejabuana, and later his grandson, Prince Jati Kusumah, continued the teachings by founding the *Paguyuban Adat Cara Karuhun Urang* (PACKU) on July 11, 1981. This organization encouraged followers to preserve the teachings of their Sundanese ancestors while abandoning Islam (Taufiq, 2013, p. 87). Third, there is the encounter between Islam and Sundanese culture that does not perpetuate old traditions like *Sunda Wiwitan* nor give rise to entirely new teachings. This adaptation is seen in the following forms.

1. Reciting the *Wawacan*

Wawacan is one of the most cherished forms of Sundanese literature. These recitals are often performed during specific ceremonies such as seven-month rituals, *marhabanan* (recitation of prayers for Prophet Muhammad), and during *lahiran and cukuran* (birth and hair-cutting ceremonies) (Taufiq, 2013). Islamic teachings conveyed through these *wawacan* recitals have produced numerous texts that recount prophetic stories, such as *Wawacan Karios para Nabi*, *Wawacan Sajarah Anbiya* (stories of the Prophets), *Wawacan Babar Nabi*, and *Wawacan Nabi Paras*. These texts are written in Arabic script but in the Sundanese language, and they are often composed in the form of *pupuh*—traditional poetry that blends Sundanese literary art with song—such as *pupuh asmarandana*, *sinom*, *kinanti*, *dandangula*, and *pangkur*.

2. Islamic Boarding School

An Islamic boarding school, known locally in Indonesia as a *pesantren*, is an institution dedicated to teaching Islamic practices and beliefs (Rasidin et al., 2024). These schools play a crucial role in transforming the traditional understanding of Islam, as presented in classical scholarly works (often referred to as “yellow books”) (Asa’ari et al., 2022; Nurjaman, Yusuf, et al., 2021), into teachings for students and the broader community (Yusuf et al., 2023). Originally used to describe Hindu educational institutions, the terms *paguron* or *padepokan* have been adopted for Islamic educational contexts while retaining the name *pesantren* (*pasantrian*). In these institutions, students focus on studying Islam under the guidance of a leader known as “*Kiai*.” Historically, the title *Kiai* was associated with sacred and magical objects, but in the context of Islamic and Sundanese cultural adaptation, it has come to denote a respected *Kiai* who is an Islamic scholar or teacher (Taufiq, 2013).

3. Islamic Mysticism

Sundanese society has a deep connection with the mystical world, evident in some doctrines and rituals that include ascetic practices similar to those in Hinduism, intertwined with mystical and mythological elements. In Islam, this mystical dimension is reflected in Sufism, which emphasizes self-purification and spiritual growth through practices such as *ujlah* (spiritual ascension) and *hijrah* (migration or journey).

4. Islamic Architecture

In architecture, the design of mosques and palace squares in Sundanese regions reflects a blend of Sundanese and Islamic cultures. Since the time of Sunan Gunung Djati’s rule from 1479-1568 AD, a Grand Mosque has been constructed in every sub-district and district square. These mosques are typically located to the west of the square, near the market, palace, and prison, and have been adapted to serve as central government buildings with a mosque (*bale nyuncung*) as the primary symbol. The *bale nyuncung* represents an adaptation to the site where the *sanghyang keresa* is believed to reside in the *nyuncung rock* (upper floor) according to *Sunda Wiwitan* teachings (Taufiq, 2013). An example of this enduring tradition can be seen in the traditional house architecture of Kampung Naga in Tasikmalaya (Nurjaman, Rusmana, et al., 2021).

Ali Puad Nasrullah noted that Islamic architecture represents a significant influence of Islam on Sundanese culture. The cultural figure from Ciamis remarked:

“The acculturation between Islamic teachings and Sundanese culture is evident in various religious symbols, such as those found in mosque architecture. This influence extends to morals, which carry an Islamic nuance, as well as to religious rituals that span from birth to death. This means that in every stage of human life in Sundanese society, cultural rites are infused with Islamic teachings.” (Nasrullah, Interview November 20 2022).

The interaction between Islamic teachings and Sundanese culture has led to several outcomes including, first, integration of Customs and Traditions: Islamic society in Sundanese culture has adapted elements of old traditions into Islamic practices. This integration has resulted in new customs, ritual ceremonies, and cultural practices that harmonize both Islamic and Sundanese elements. Second, Architectural Development: both sacred and secular architecture, such as mosques, palaces, and town squares, have evolved to incorporate local building designs and ornaments. This includes integrating elements from pre-Islamic architecture into Islamic architectural styles; Third, Artistic Expression: The development of glass painting, sculpture, and other art forms has led to the creation of distinctive Islamic calligraphy. Additionally, *genjring* and tambourine arts, which originated in Arabic culture, and various traditional performances with an Islamic touch have become prominent in Sundanese art, often featured in art performances and wedding celebrations. Fourth, Religious Texts and Thought: Islamic boarding schools have played a key role in the development of religious literature, producing works such as *wawacan*, *serat suluk*, and *barzanji*. Many of these texts are preserved in the palaces of Cirebon, museums, and among the Sundanese people; Fifth, Ritual and Life Cycle Ceremonies: Traditional ceremonies, including the *tujuh bulanan* (seventh-month anniversary) ceremony, as well as ceremonies of birth, wedding, and funeral, have been infused with Islamic practices. This includes incorporating recitals of *barzanji*, *marhabanan*, *shalawat*, and *tahlil* into these events.

THE INFLUENCE OF ISLAM ON SUNDANESE CULTURE

Cultural acculturation refers to the blending or encounter between two or more different cultures resulting from social interaction. This process creates a new culture that differs from the original and is practiced within society (Rudiansyah et al., 2017). Based on this definition, the introduction of Islamic

teachings to the archipelago was influenced by a variety of developments that involved the acculturation of local cultures from different regions in Indonesia. In areas with rich traditional cultures, there was a blending with Islamic teachings, which can be described as a process of acculturation (Al-Amri & Haramain, 2017).

The influence of Islam on Sundanese culture is evident in the social structure of Tatar Sunda, at least up until the early 20th century. For example, the social structure of urban society was divided into classes such as the *menak* (nobility). Wibisana classifies this structure into three main groups: *priyayi* (the elite), *urang kaum* (those associated with the mosque), and *urang pasar* (traders), in addition to *sonah* (the common people). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, there are also distinctions between *ajeungans* (*kiai*) and *santri*. At the district or capital level, *urang kaum* are led by the *penghulu besar*, while the *kewedanaan* (district) and sub-district are led by the *naib*, and the village by the *lebe*. People at the district level often had strong connections with the *ajeung*, such as the notable prince Haji Hasan Mustafa (1900) who had ties with the *kiai* Kurdi in Singaparna and the Ajeungan Bangkonol in the Bandung area (Wibisana, 2013). The influence of Islam on Sundanese culture is also evident in various traditional Sundanese ceremonies, which now include prayers and thanksgiving in line with Islamic practices. Similarly, in *wayang* (shadow puppetry) stories, which originate from India and contain Hindu teachings, Islamic influence is apparent. Efforts by early Muslim missionaries in Sunda have infused these stories with Islamic elements, integrating Islamic teachings into the traditional *wayang* narratives.

Ali Puad Nasrullah, a cultural expert from Ciamis, remarked:

Before Islam arrived, the region was dominated by Hindu kingdoms such as Tarumanegara and Sunda Pandjadjaran. When Islam came to West Java, it encountered a region rich in culture and art. For instance, traditional ceremonies such as *hajat bumi* and *hajat laut* show gratitude to God and are celebrated during specific times such as harvest or the start of the fishing season. These ceremonies, which originally had Hindu influences, have incorporated Islamic prayers and rituals. Similarly, in art forms like *wayang golek*, which often explores themes of human-divine, human-human, and human-nature relationships, Islamic teachings have influenced the content and moral messages, promoting good conduct among the Sundanese people (Nasrullah, Interview, 20 November 2022).

Suarman, an artist from Bandung, remarked:

Islam has profoundly influenced Sundanese culture. Islamic teachings

have significantly impacted various aspects of Sundanese cultural life, including customs and traditions. For instance, the practice of *tahlilan*, which involves reciting prayers for the deceased, is unique to Sundanese culture and does not originate from Arabia. Similarly, the tradition of visiting or making pilgrimages to family tombs during *Lebaran* is a practice specific to Sundanese culture and is not found in Arabia. (Suarman, Interview, 23 November 2022).

The influence of Islam on Sundanese culture extends to mysticism. Pre-Islamic Sundanese society had a deep affinity for mysticism and mythology. This pre-existing interest in the mystical world made it easier for Islamic preachers in Tatar Sunda to introduce Islamic mysticism, as Islam also encompasses mystical concepts. This alignment helped facilitate the acceptance of Islam among the Sundanese people.

Suarman later remarked:

The influence of Islam on Sundanese culture is evident in various mystical practices. One example is the use of incense. Frankincense is a staple in religious rituals among the Sundanese people. Its use has been influenced by Islamic traditions, where it serves as a room freshener, similar to the burning of *buhur* in the tradition of the Prophet's descendants, known as the *habaib*. In Sundanese religious rites, incense symbolizes recognition of a power greater than humans—God. This practice reflects the Sundanese people's respect for their relationship with God, fellow humans, and nature, using frankincense to signify this reverence (Suarman, Interview, 23 November 2022).

The process of Islamization can be seen as an interaction between two or more cultures: the one spreading Islam and the one receiving it. In Tatar Sunda, this process represents a form of assimilation and acculturation, where various cultures (Arab, Persian, and Indian) blended with the local Sundanese culture, resulting in the formation of a distinct Sundanese Islamic culture.

Farid Maul, a cleric from Garut, noted as follows:

the influence of Islam on Sundanese culture is deeply embedded. For example, the term *ngahiyang*—which is similar to the concept of *moksa*—reflects how the presence of Islam has led the Sundanese people to practice ancestral teachings in a way that is framed by Islamic values. This integration encourages attitudes and ways of thinking that move beyond solely worldly concerns. Additionally, the term *pamali*, which refers to prohibitions or sinful acts, illustrates another Islamic influence. For instance, the Sundanese believe it is forbidden to sweep at night,

considering it *pamali*. This belief is linked to Islamic mysticism, as noted in classic Islamic texts like *ta'lim muta'lim*, where Sheikh Al-Jarnuzi warns that sweeping at night may bring poverty. Many such *pamali* terms are connected to Islamic concepts adopted by the Sundanese people. (Maul, Interview, 21 November 2022).

Islam was readily accepted by the Sundanese people because its principles closely aligned with their existing cultural values. As the Sundanese people developed their identity during the Islamization process, Islam seamlessly integrated into their culture, becoming a fundamental part of their collective identity. Islam entered Sunda primarily through education and preaching rather than through conquest or warfare, which contributed to a peaceful integration of Islamic practices. As a result, Islam became an integral part of Sundanese culture. Since its introduction by Sunan Gunung Djati, the process of Islamization proceeded smoothly, with the Sundanese people embracing Islam as naturally as if they were adopting their own cultural practices (Kahmad, 2013).

The influence of Islam on Sundanese society is profound, particularly in areas such as inheritance law, which follows Islamic principles of *fiqh* (Islamic law), and marriage, which blends Islamic practices with traditional Sundanese ceremonies. This influence extends throughout various stages of human life, from birth to death. Islamic teachings are reflected in ceremonies, daily transactions, and dietary practices. The belief system of the Sundanese people centers on the highest supernatural power, Gusti Allah, who is seen as omnipotent and decisive. While some remnants of pre-Islamic beliefs persist in certain circles, the majority of Sundanese people have embraced Islam wholeheartedly, including faith in Allah and the Prophet Muhammad SAW, whom they regard as the final Prophet. The celebration of *Muludan*, which honors the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, features acts of charity and extensive religious gatherings with prominent preachers from other regions (Kahmad, 2013).

Farid Maul, a cleric from Garut, noted that the acculturation of Islam with Sundanese culture is evident in various aspects of daily life. Today, expressions such as *Jodo*, *Pati*, *Bagja*, *Cilaka*, and *Pangeran nu Nangtukeun* reflect the Sundanese belief that a person's soulmate, life, death, and experiences of happiness or misfortune are all determined by God. Despite this belief in destiny, Sundanese people are not passive. Their values of *asah*, *asih*, and *asuh* emphasize mutual development and knowledge expansion. The culture of *silih asah* fosters a society with character and a passion for learning, leading to a life of independence

and discipline. Some proverbs directly linked to Islam include: *Kokoro manggih Mulud*, *Puasa manggih Lebaran* (the poor celebrate the Prophet's Birthday, those who fast celebrate Lebaran) and *Jauh ke bedug* (far from the sound of the *bedug* in the mosque). In contrast, other proverbs use terminology unique to Sundanese culture with no direct connection to Islam, such as *cul dog-dog tinggal igel* (dancing without music) and *kandel kulit beungeut* (thick-skinned face) (Maul, Interview, 21 November 2022).

It is evident that Sundanese people focus more on the essence of Islam rather than religious formalism, incorporating its principles into their everyday lives. This approach is reflected in their oral traditions, particularly in the figure of *Si Kabayan*. The character of *Si Kabayan* represents someone who has achieved both physical and spiritual well-being, remaining unaffected by external, worldly concerns. *Si Kabayan* views life as *heuheuy jeung deudeuh*, meaning that life is a source of joy and affection. This perspective aligns with the Quranic verse *Innal hayata dunya laibun wa lahwun* (Indeed, the life of this world is but play and amusement) and the Hadith of the Prophet, *Love what is on earth, and you will be loved by what is in the heavens* (Kahmad, 2013, p. 103).

CONCLUSION

The Sundanese people were quick to embrace Islamic teachings. As the majority religion in West Java, Islam played a significant role in the acculturation process, creating a balanced practice of religion that incorporated local cultural elements rather than eliminating them. Early Islamic preachers and religious teachers in Tatar Sunda utilized a cultural approach during the Islamization process, resulting in a distinctive form of Sundanese Islam that harmonized with and enriched Sundanese culture.

Traces and forms of the acculturation between Islam and Sundanese culture can be observed in various aspects, including *wawacan* texts, pesantren education, Islamic mysticism (*tasawuf-tariqa*), and Islamic-Sundanese architecture, such as mosques in West Java. The Sundanese people have embraced Islamic teachings easily, as the simplicity of Islam aligns with their cultural values. Consequently, as the Sundanese people learn about Islam, they also engage with their own cultural traditions. This is a result of the adept methods used by early Islamic missionaries in Tatar Sunda. The Sundanese concepts of *cageur*, *bageur*, *someah ka semah*, and *nyaah ka sasama* resonate closely with Islamic teachings. As a result, many aspects of Sundanese life, such as *salametan* (communal feast), *syukuran* (thanksgiving), *nikahan* (marriage), *opatpuluhan*

(fourtieth-day celebration), and *muludan* (the Prophet's birthday), are deeply intertwined with Islamic practices. Even the laws governing inheritance and marriage in Sundanese culture are based on the principles of *fiqh* (Islamic law).

This research explores how the acculturation of Islam with Sundanese culture in West Java has led to the development of a Sundanese culture inspired by Islamic teachings. Recommendations for future research include examining the specific traditions within various Sundanese ceremonies that are influenced by Islam. For instance, investigating the Islamic teachings embedded in *wawacan* texts and their impact on these traditions would be valuable.

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