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The Wali, the Woman, the Lion: Pesisir Performance and Chinese and Persianate Islam on Java

Kathy Foley
University of California, Santa Cruz, USA
email: kfoley@ucsc.edu

**correspondence author*

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of Chinese and Persian Muslims on performance traditions in both coastal regions and the highlands of West Java, and explores how these traditions have served as enduring records of the long history of Islamic cultural hybridity in the Malay–Indonesian world. Employing a qualitative approach, the study uses historical-cultural analysis of textual sources, performative forms, and oral narratives. The data include stories of the Wali Songo, representations of Chinese female figures in the mythologies of Islamic kingdoms, genealogies of wayang golek, and the depiction of leonine figures within ritual settings and martial arts traditions. The findings demonstrate that interactions among Shiʿi communities, Sufi diasporas, Chinese networks, and Persian influences during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries contributed significantly to shaping Javanese religious life and aesthetics, particularly through the medium of performance. Traces of exchange across trade routes, social communities, and religious networks have remained preserved within contemporary artistic expressions. Despite periodic pressures from fundamentalist currents seeking to narrow the public expression of Southeast Asian Islam, performance traditions continue to function as spaces for the preservation of plural memories and intercultural encounters.This article contributes to scholarship on Islam Nusantara, cultural history, and performance studies by positioning West Javanese performance traditions as a “living archive” that not only preserves but also reactivates complex histories of diaspora contact, mobility, and Islamic diversity in Indonesia.
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Keywords:

Islamic Performing Arts, Lion Dance, Pencak Silat, Wali Songo, Wayang Golek

Author correspondence email: kfoley@ucsc.edu
Available online at:

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti pengaruh Muslim Tionghoa dan Persia terhadap tradisi pertunjukan di wilayah pesisir dan dataran tinggi Jawa Barat, serta mengeksplorasi bagaimana tradisi-tradisi ini telah berfungsi sebagai catatan abadi dari sejarah panjang hibriditas budaya Islam di dunia Melayu-Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, studi ini menggunakan analisis historis-budaya dari sumber-sumber tekstual, bentuk-bentuk pertunjukan, dan narasi lisan. Data meliputi kisah Wali Songo, representasi tokoh perempuan Tionghoa dalam mitologi kerajaan Islam, silsilah wayang golek, dan penggambaran tokoh singa dalam pengaturan ritual dan tradisi seni bela diri. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa interaksi antara komunitas Syiah, diaspora Sufi, jaringan Tionghoa, dan pengaruh Persia selama abad ke-15 dan ke-16 memberikan kontribusi signifikan dalam membentuk kehidupan dan estetika keagamaan Jawa, khususnya melalui media pertunjukan. Jejak pertukaran di sepanjang jalur perdagangan, komunitas sosial, dan jaringan keagamaan tetap terpelihara dalam ekspresi artistik kontemporer. Terlepas dari tekanan berkala dari arus fundamentalis yang berupaya mempersempit ekspresi publik Islam Asia Tenggara, tradisi pertunjukan terus berfungsi sebagai ruang untuk pelestarian ingatan jamak dan pertemuan antarbudaya. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada kajian tentang Islam Nusantara, sejarah budaya, dan studi pertunjukan dengan memposisikan tradisi pertunjukan Jawa Barat sebagai "arsip hidup" yang tidak hanya melestarikan tetapi juga mengaktifkan kembali sejarah kompleks kontak diaspora, mobilitas, dan keragaman Islam di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci:

Barongsai, Pencak Silat, Seni Pertunjukan Islam, Wali Songo, Wayang Golek

Introduction

The Wali: On the tenth of Muharam, the day of mourning for Hussein the third Shi'a Imam, believers gather in Kudus for Buka Luwur the ritual changing of the cloth that covers the tomb of Sunan Kudus (1500-1550?), one of Wali Songo (Nine Saints) collectively credited with bringing Islam to Java using arts as a tool of conversion. Sunan Kudus' tale links to both Persian inflected Islam and Chinese wood culture. He is said to have invented *wayang golek*, the wooden doll rod puppetry tradition, which tells tales of Amir Hamzah, uncle of the Prophet (wayang menak); histories (babad) of the Islamic courts of Java (wayang cepak); and other tales. Sunan Kudus' given name was Jafar As-Shadiq, after the sixth Shi'a Imam (Jafar ibn Muhammed al-Shadiq, 702-

765 CE), and Kudus himself was the son of Utsman Al-Hamadani, indicating the father was presumably from Hamadan province in Persia/Iran. The faithful who attend Kudus' ritual each year carry home rice bundled in teak leaves, ensuring a blessing. The ideas and practices show old links to both Persian Islam and woodworking, a skill associated with the early Chinese diaspora in Java. Chinese influence may have inspired Kudus' innovation of wooden puppets to tell Islamic and local tales, rather than using the older shadow theatre figures (wayang kulit), popular from the Hindu-Buddhist era telling "purwa" tales (localized versions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) (Foley,1986). The growing trade of the fifteenth and sixteenth century which triangulated China-Java-India helped inspire this new art of wayang menak/ wayang cepak along the north coast of Java and the Wali Sunan Kudus is a marker of Chinese and Persian links.

The Woman: For each *jumat kilwon* (when ritually important days of the seven- and five-day weeks of the Javanese calendar systems coincide) and for *Maulid* (birthday of the Prophet), a crowd of Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians gathers at the royal cemetery of Gunung Sembung in Cirebon on the north coast of West Java to visit (*ziarah*) at the tomb of the Chinese princess, Ong Tien Nio, in hopes of accruing blessings. Lore claims this princess was the daughter of a "Ming Hong Gie" (said by Indonesians to be son to the Ming Yongle Emperor) and she was converted to Islam by and subsequently married to Sunan Gunung Jati (d. 1568) ruler of Cirebon, a second of the Wali Songo (Warto'i, 2024). Like Sunan Kudus, Gunung Jati is said to have used the arts to convert West Java to Islam, his influence extending from the Pesisir (north coast) through the mountains of Pasundan. In West Java, people say it was Gunung Jati's Muslim proselytization in China that led to this intercultural pairing bringing the settlement of many Muslim Chinese, including many artists, in her retinue in Cirebon. An intermarriage trope occurs rather regularly between Southeast Asia Muslims and elite Chinese women in tales of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, when Java was a mid-point on the maritime silk road between China and points west. Chinese Muslims, a resident merchant community in Java, played a part in dakwah that established Islam on the island (Muljana, 2005). Though this Chinese woman was unlikely to have been an actual Ming princess, intermarriage between Chinese families resident in Java and local elites were common along the sea silk road. The tale of a "Ming emperor" connection is probably meant to raise the status of a union, showing local efforts to valorize intermarriage with Chinese Muslim elites. The now contemporary tourist advisories, in a more recent iteration, tell us Gunung Jati "ascended the throne as the second King of Cirebon in 1479. Furthermore, his marriage to Princess Ong Tien Nio, the daughter of the Ming Dynasty Emperor, reflects a rich cultural background. This diverse heritage is

evident in the architecture of his tomb, which uniquely blends Javanese, Arabic, and Chinese styles." (see https://cirebonprofileandtourism.com/2025/06/17/sunan-gunung-jati-tomb-at-cirebon-west-java/).

The Lion during circumcisions in Cirebon, West Java the young boys are paraded on animal palanquins in an art called *burak/borak*. Often these are feline figures, but also the winged creature (*borak*) that carried the prophet on his Night Journey to Jerusalem. Other beast—elephant, eagle, horse—may also be presented. The adult male palanquin bearers often move using martial stances as musical accompaniment blares (usually a mixture shawm and drums, but nowadays also electric guitars). Members of the community join in the dancing procession as the entourage moves through the village. Leonine figures and related displays of *pencak silat*/martial arts for circumcision performances were a featured phenomenon of circumcision ceremonies in the 1970s when I did arts research in Pasundan. My silat teachers in the Suwanda family of Bandung, whom I accompanied to performances of *pencak* dance and sparring, acknowledged the Chinese martial influences in their local fighting styles. They shared the lore that *pencak silat* was created by yet another of the Wali Songo, Sunan Kalijaga (1450-1592?), saying the training was developed to teach Islamic values. The leonine figures that children mount and the martial arts displayed during Muslim circumcision celebrations are found in many areas of Indonesia and regularly feature young male performers under a teacher/troupe leader in ways that remind of how martial arts are linked with lion dance in Chinese society. These lion figures are likely part of Chinese cultural impacts moving along the maritime silk road (Bandem & DeBoer, 1992), (Foley, 2016) & (Tan, 2019).

These three concepts—the Wali, the woman, and the lion—exhibit Chinese and Persianate Muslim influences in Java's performing arts, past (stories of the Wali) to present (dancing lions). I grant that the lore of the saints as reflected by my interlocutors largely comes from *babad* (chronicle tales), stories which were orally preserved prior to the eighteenth century. Still these tales were and are alive, presented in *wayang cepak lakon* (stories) and oral tradition which, though not archival documentation from era of these saints, carry messages about the performing arts of Java worth considering. They represent persistent links to past impacts of Chinese and Persian Muslims in Java in the period when the Islamic coastal culture fully developed (fifteenth to seventeenth century). Scholarly inquiry on the issues of Chinese in Muslimization has been interrogated by Lombard and Salmon (1984) and most researchers tracing Chinese links have depended on the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, stories of Chinese Muslim which, though probably based on older traditions, is only an eighteenth century rendition. However, in a recent review of sources

"China and the Rise of Islam on Java", Wain evaluates multiple texts—*Summa Oriental of Tomé Pires* (1513-5515), Thomas Stamford Raffles' *The History of Java* (1817), the Banten seventeenth century chronicle *Hikyat Hasanuddin*, the well-known Javanese *Babad Tanah Jawi* (1690-1718), and the Cirebon chronicle *Purwaka Caruban Nagari* (1720). Wain argues persuasively that Gresik was an earlier Islamic center than Demak, noting "Java's earliest Islamic figures are all associated with it [Gresik] . . .. Later in the mid fourteenth century, a Chinese Muslim merchant traveled from Gresik to Demak. There he founded a sultanate which quickly began to spread Islam across the rest of the island" and these Chinese Indonesian rulers of Demak built on the conversion begun in Gresik, which "demonstrates prior constructions of early Javanese Islamic history have, first, wrongly identified Arabs and Indian Muslims as the island's principal missionaries and, second, incorrectly labeled fifteenth century Demak as Java's first powerful Islamic kingdom" (Wain, A., 2017).

These traces remained embedded in the practice of twentieth century Muslim puppetry, martial arts lore, and community ritual. In this paper will outline evidence from arts, analyze implications, and argue the contemporary tendency to downplay China and Persia in local interplay with Islam is a part of the late colonial era which highlighted Indian-centrism and the more recent Hejaz-centrism as strong Sunni orthodoxy, fueled by oil dollars and Indonesian guest workers sojourns in Saudi, have increasingly led to disfavor of indigenous Islamic practices. However, figures of the Wali Songo, the Chinese princess, and the dancing lion are lore and practices representative of the longue durée. Hybrid Pesisir Islamic arts creatively melded the local with diverse sources—Sinitic and Persianate, as well as Indic and Hejaz-originated, to form the distinctive local expressions of religiosity that figures like Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid, 1940-2009) and Nahdlatul Ulama articulated as Islam Pribumi (Indigenous Islam) or Islam Nusantara (Archipelagic Islam).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology that integrates historical analysis, textual interpretation, and performance studies to examine Chinese and Persianate Islamic influences in Javanese coastal arts. First, primary textual sources, including *babad*, chronicle literature, hagiographies of the Wali Songo, and early travel accounts such as Ma Huan and Tomé Pires, were analyzed to trace narrative patterns related to saints, intercultural marriages, and coastal political formations. These were triangulated with secondary historiographical works on Islamisation, diaspora networks, and material culture to contextualize the emergence of Sino-Persian influences on Java's north coast.

Second, archival and ethnographic materials from prior fieldwork in Cirebon, Kudus, Bandung, and other Pasisir regions were revisited. These include documentation of wayang golek, *burok*/ *sisingaan* rituals, pencak silat performances, and other animal-figure genres. Performance analysis focused on iconography, movement vocabulary, ritual function, and the social roles of performers, tracing how artistic forms encode memories of mobility, trade, and religious encounter. This study adopts a comparative cultural approach, juxtaposing Javanese performative motifs with Chinese diasporic practices and Persian-Sufi aesthetic traces. Through this triangulated method, textual, historical, and performative, the article interprets West Javanese performance traditions as living archives of long-term intercultural exchange.

Result and Discussion

The Wali

Sinitic and Persian links are embedded in tales of many of the Wali Songo ensuring South Chinese Muslims and Persian Sufis were part of early Islam in Java. While historically verifiable documents are sparse for the early Islamic period, the coast of Java was the site of resident Chinese Muslim merchants by the time Ma Huan (马欢,1380-1460) who chronicled voyages of the Chinese general Zheng He ([郑和], also Cheng Ho or Sam Po Kong, 1371-1433). Ma (1970) writing after his Ming era visits in the early fifteenth century noted the large early Chinese Muslim community at Gresik (which he tells us in Chinese was then called Ko-erh-hsi). Ma further tells:

> The ruler of the village is a man from Kuang tung [Guangdong]. There are something more than a thousand [Chinese Muslim] families. Foreigners from every place come here in great numbers to trade. Gold, all kinds of precious stones, and all varieties of foreign goods are sold in great quantities! The people are very wealthy. (Ma, 1970, p. 89)

Ma discuss the presence of Muslims from the west in the ports Zheng He visited as well but highlights a Chinese diaspora "who fled away and now live in this country [Java] . . . many of them follow the Muslim faith, doing penance and fasting" (p. 92).

Gresik was at the time perhaps the major port, founded by these diasporic Chinese with Maulana Malik Ibrahim (d. 1419) as a main Muslim teacher (Foley, 2021). He is thought to have been born in Central Asia, perhaps Samarkand, and taught Islam first in Champa (in present day Vietnam) where he is said to have lived thirteen years, marrying a "Princess" of Champa. He came to Gresik, reportedly accompanying another Champa princess

(Dwarawati) as part of the retinue when she married the Majapahit ruler Brawijaja V. In Gresik Maulana Malik Ibrahim's son born in Champa, Sunan Ampel (1401-1481), also known as Raden Rahmat and/or sometimes identified as Bong Swi Hoo [Chinese name], continued his father's dakwah.

Sunan Ampel was a pivotal figure of the Nine Wali—teacher and relative of many of the other Wali. Ampel is said to have married a Chinese woman, Nyi Gede Manila daughter of a Chinese captain from Tuban, a nearby port community on Java. This mixed marriage gave birth to two more Wali (Sunan Bonang [1465-1525] and Sunan Drajat [1470-1522]). Sunan Bonang was in turn a teacher of Sunan Kalijaga (1450-1513/1592?), the best known of the Wali, who used wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) to effect conversion while Bonang is credited with musical innovations. To Kalijaga many other artistic accomplishments are routinely credited, from martial arts (pencak silat) to ronggeng (female/transvestite song-dance forms) (see Foley 2015). Kalijaga is said to have spent time in Cirebon at the court of the Wali Sunan Gunung Jati who married Ong Tien. The Wali Songo generally collaborated in founding, ruling, and serving as ulama in many of coastal Muslim city-states. Kalijaga's son Sunan Muria (d. 1551) is yet another artist-saint, a mixture that persists to the present (Hew, 2024).

Sunan Ampel's daughter, Syarifah, married Sunan Ampel's student, Sunun Ngudung (d. 1525) and their child was Sunan Kudus (1500-1550), the aforementioned Wali creator of wayang golek/rod puppetry. Sunan Kudus is said to have modeled his own performances on those of Sunan Kalijaga, but substituted wooden rod puppets (golek) for Kalijaga's shadow figures and presented Islamic tales such as Amir Hamzah or local chronicle stories, not Kalijaga's *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* which are the purwa ("old", "original", Hindu-derived but Islamic-ly reworked) repertoire.

Sunan Giri (1442-1506) was a nephew of Maulana Malik Ibrahim and yet another Wali. He studied with his cousin Sunan Ampel at Gresik, then founded another Islamic school (pesantran) in the region. Giri's foster mother is said to be another powerful Chinese Muslim, Shi Daniang (施大娘), from Palembang, who administered the port, fostering both Islam and trade in Gresik. Giri himself helped found Demak, the first Muslim kingdom on Java [but after Gresik if we are to follow Wain (2017)]. Giri was spiritual guide to Raden Patah (Chinese name Jin Bun [靳文], 1455-1518), who once again had studied under Sunan Ampel in Gresik. Raden Patah is, according to lore, said to be the son of the earlier mentioned Brawijaya V (r. 1468-1478), the last monarch of Majapahit, the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom and a Chinese concubine/princess who was banished due to the jealousy of Brawijaya V's main queen, Dwarawati of Champa (this is one version). Others say Raden Patah's mother was just a local Chinese woman Siu Ban Ci, daughter of a

Chinese Muslim teacher-trader Syekh Bentong (Tan Go Hwat) in Gresik. Patah ruled in Demak from about 1475-1518 (Cortesão, 1944).

The history of these figures is cloudy and even their lifespans can be questionable. For example Sunan Kalijaga is said to have lived 142 years and Sunan Gunung Jati, in some listings, 120! Each of the Wali Songo has own grave site for visitation, but we can also find tombs for all nine saints at sites like Gunung Sembung in Cirebon. These Wali Songo have multiple names used at different points in their lives and many legendary feats. These figures combined political and spiritual power in a specific territory, but sons or grandsons sometimes used the same moniker (perhaps explaining the extended lifespans). Yet even as we are dealing with legend rather than documented history, there are significant patterns. There are nine Wali at any one point in time. They are the conceptual council of Muslim practice. They all are bound together—by belief, teaching lineage (sisilah), blood, intermarriage, and political alliance. In their stories Chinese/Persian Muslims, coastal city sovereignty and trade, and dakwah intertwine. Though one can find Wali whose background links more to the Hejaz, these Islamic coastal kingdoms of Java reveal Sufi approaches to religion that are often aligned with Central Asia and China (whose Islam came via Persia). The non-Hejaz ancestry resulted, as in Persia and China, in the ample use of poetry, song, music, puppetry, dance, and iconographic imagery in archipelagic Islam, creating practices that some contemporary Sunni trained in the Middle East currently attack as heterodox.

The material culture of the Pesisir also evinces a rich Sino-Indonesian connection in visuals—including ceramics and wood arts. Chinese porcelain is an featured in the wall design of tombs of the saints, including those at Gunung Sembung discussed above. In Cirebon, Chinese jars and plates, said to be from the time of the Wali, are also used for celebrations of Islamic holydays; the Panjang Jimat ("Long Heirlooms"), for example which I saw used in ceremonies in the 1970s, are Chinese jars and plates on which offerings are carried for the annual processional celebration of Mulid, the birthday of the Prophet. People flock gather to get small portions of the rice that is carried on them and which will ensure blessings.

The woodworking also has Chinese influence. It is in the era of Islamization that we find a transition from shadow figures (documented in Java as early as 840 CE) to wooden puppets, both flat images (wayang klitik) and three dimensional doll figures (wayang golek). This probably comes from the influence of Chinese, a group on Java's north coast of that era that was preeminent in wood arts. We have recurring stories of the impact of Chinese Muslims teaching both Islam and woodworking. Kyai The Ling Sing (also Telingsing, Javanese spelling of Chinese name) is said by some to have come on the ship of Zheng He and stayed to preach Islam and wood crafting in Kudus

(Shavir, 2021). Sunan Kudus is said to have later made innovation in this Sino-Javanese local expertise and himself combined the same specialties—wood arts and Islamic teaching, creating *wayang golek*. In nearby Jepara, a second wood arts center, a Chinese Muslim carver-religious teacher-political leader Tjie Hwio Gwan (again, Javanese spelling of Chinese name) is credited with establishing local wood working, and ruling the city as he taught Islam under the Javanese name, Sungsing Badar Duwung (Kusumawati et. al., 2022). He is said to have collaborated with Sunan Kudus, spreading both wood arts and Islam.

It makes sense that wood workers from Southern China, accustomed to both marionette and rod puppets, would use their skills to create wooden figures. The traditional repertoire of these wooden doll puppets, although it included some of the pre-Islam Majapahit stories (Panji, Damar Wulan tales), is along the north coast of Java, most notable for its Islamic stories and not the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* repertoire. Amir Hamzah and the tales of the Wali Songo themselves are foregrounded. As I have written elsewhere:

> In these stories [of the birth of wayang golek], we find some combination of Chinese heritage, Islam, and wood arts interlinked in the era of Wali. These histories are admittedly limited in detail, yet some physical remains from the period of the Wali show that Chinese Muslim influences mixed with local traditions in material elements (Foley, 2021, p. 15)

I likewise argued there that Javanese mosque architecture may also have Chinese influences:

> The architecture of China's Guanzhou Huaisheng Mosque, rebuilt in 1695 after a fire, may still reflect in part the architecture of its predecessor, the first mosque in China, which was built in the Tang era. It has the kind of layered roof that we see in the oldest Javanese mosques. (p. 15)

The layered roof mosques in Demak (1477) and Cirebon (1489) are said to have been built by the Wali Songo themselves. We can question the miraculous tales of the building process—that the saints constructed the mosque of Demak in a single night or that Sunan Kalijaga created one of the roof supports (soko guru) by molding together wood shavings—yet we should still note that the oldest mosques around the gulf of Thailand/South China Sea (Kampung Laut in Kelantan, Malaysia and Surau Aur in Patani, Thailand) share the architectural design with these old Javanese mosques.

These old mosques are part of a circum-Gulf of Thailand Islamic architecture style, which seems to be a mixture of Sinitic and indigenous features that required carpentry skills perhaps honed in coastal China. The

building implies that Islam in this region may be more affected by Chinese models and did not take the domed mosques from the Middle East. (p. 15)

The Woman

A legend of familial relations that triangulate—between a Chinese "princess", a figure who converts the area to Islam, and a Hindu-Buddhist indigenous ruler—is a significant trope along Southeast Asian trade routes in the era of Islamization. In West Java, Princess Ong Tien/ Ong Tien Nio, the "Chinese emperor's daughter" marries Sunan Gunung Jati, said to be grandson of the King Siliwangi of Pakuan/Pajajaran, the inland Hindu-Buddhist kingdom. Sunan Gunung Jati founds the Islamic court of Cirebon and his grandfather yields power to him. Similarly, in Central Java, the "Chinese concubine" marries Brawijaya V of the inland kingdom of Majapahit and gives birth to Raden Patah/Jin Bun, who founds Muslim Demak, as Majapahit falls.

Chinese women are significant in local tales of the Hindu-Buddhist to Islamic transition. In each case a coastal male ruler is husband/son of a Chinese woman who brings a formerly Hindu-Buddhist area to Islam. Though in such stories the woman may, as Ong Tien, be acclaimed as daughter or grandchild of a Ming "emperor", historians find no traces in Ming chronicles of actual Chinese royals intermarrying. It is likely these legends only indicate intermarriages between elite families of resident Chinese trading communities with emergent politically powerful Muslim local men who established control over trade ports during an era that the inland agriculturally-focused kingdom (i. e., Pajajaran, Majapahit) was being overshadowed by coastal city-states. These new rulers reclaimed the aura of the past for the Muslim polity.

Who were these men and their spouses? In the Ong Tien story Sunan Gunung Jati is said to be the grandson of the Prabu Siliwangi, the last Hindu-Buddhist monarch in West Java (Paukan/Pajaran Kingdom). As the story I learned in wayang cepak goes Rara Santang, Gunung Jati's mother and her brother Walungsungsang/Cakrabuwana leave the capital of Pakuan Pajararan where their father Prabu Siliwangi reigns. They study Islam at Amparan Jati in the Cirebon area with Shaik Datuk Kahfi from Mecca. Next the pair go on Haj. Rara Santang takes the name Syarifah Modain; marries an Egyptian prince named Syarif Abdullah Umdatuddin; and their child is Hidayatullah/Sunan Gunung Jati. On his return to Java Gunung Jati settles near his uncle Walungsungsang/Cakrabuwana on the coast and both preach Islam. Then Gunung Jati founds the court Pakungwati and builds the mosque Sang Ciptarasa establishing Cirebon. Prabu Siliwangi, Gunung Jati's grandfather, refusing to convert, but not wanting to oppose his descendants, transforms with his attendants into tigers (macan) and dematerializes (moksa) into the spirit realm. As Pajajaran is abandoned, Cirebon advances, converting first the north

coast as far as Banten and soon thereafter the highlands of West Java. Sunan Gunung Jati also carries his preaching mission to China. The emperor of China, to deceive this holy man, has his daughter pretends to be pregnant. Sunan Jati affirms the virginal Ong Tien is fully with child. To the surprise of the princess, in that moment, she miraculously conceives. She converts and follows Gunung Jati to Cirebon, marrying him. The glass painters, batik makers, wood workers and others who develop the Sino-Javanese arts of Cirebon are said to be part of her entourage that came to Gunung Jati's court. Thus today at her tomb the many Chinese Indonesians of all faiths make visitation today (Siddique, 1977; Sulendraningrat, 1985; Setiono, 2008).

In Raden Patah's legend, the Chinese concubine of King Brawijaya V is envied by Majapahit first queen (the aforementioned the Princess of Champa who Wali Maulana Malik Ibrahim accompanied to Java). Brawijaya V sends the Chinese concubine away to Palembang, but she is already pregnant with his son Raden Patah (also called Raden Hasan, Chinese name Jin Bun). In Palembang she marries the Muslim ruler Arya Damar (himself son of a Chinese mother). This Chinese concubine's second son, Raden Husain/Kusan/ Kin San becomes Raden Patah's right hand man and follows him back to Java. Both study at the pesantran of Sunan Ampel. Eventually Brawijaya yields to his son Raden Patah. Majapahit falls as Patah founds Demak. Once again a Chinese princess, a Hindu-Buddhist monarch, and the founder of a new Muslim order are part of the same family tree.

The trope of a Chinese princess is part of Islamic conversion stories along these trade routes. Though the stories may tell us the Chinese wife was an emperor's daughter (as in Cirebon's Ong Tien and the related legend of Hang Po Li, the Chinese princess who marries Sultan Mansur Shah the ruler of Malacca) (Samsuddin & Bujang, 2013), no marriages of such "princesses" are documented in actual Chinese court records. However Chinese trade was active and Hui Chinese families were present in all these important ports as documented by Portuguese and Chinese who visited in the fifteenth century (Cortesão, 1944; Graaf & Pigeaud, 1984; Ma, 1970). Intermarriage of local men with daughters of diasporic Muslim Chinese who settled to facilitate trade was part of the rise of these coastal cities. Inland kingdoms (Pajajaran, Majapahit) declined before the dominance of this new order of maritime trade. The "Chinese wife" is a marker of the cultural and religious transition.

Stories of these Chinese wives remain part of the repertoire of wayang cepak, wooden rod puppetry in Javanese dress, recounting legends found in babad, chronicle tales, that were written by descendants of the coastal elites to explain the history of their own ancestors—the Muslim ruling families of coastal Java. Such tales are of course not exact histories, but indicate a melding of Chinese and local lineages in the age of Islamization. In the case of Sunan

Gunung Jati, his mother and uncle come from the highlands (Pajararan), and settle on the coast where Gunung Jati will become the major saint as he converts all West Java. For Raden Patah, the Chinese concubine (whose origin some say may have been in the Chinese community of Champa) conceives by the Hindu Buddhist Brawijaya V in the inland court of Majapahit and then her son Patah/Jin Bun with the teaching of Sunan Ampel and help of Sunan Giri and the other saints effects the conversion of Demak which leads to Central Java's conversion and the birth of Mataram. The formula is a male (said to be descended from royal blood of the non-Muslim dynasty) plus a Chinese woman leads to a new Islamic order. Such tales connect Chinese and conversion, as the coastal Islamic trading kingdoms surpass the inland agricultural realms in power, authority, and religious influence.

The Lion

Forms like *burok*/*burak* in Cirebon have children mounted on a palanquin: a winged lion, tiger, or another real or mythical creature. They are paraded around the village as part of circumcision rites. Musicians play genjing (frame drums), gong, gitar (gitaur) and biola (violin). A female singer (pasinden) sings lyrics in praise of Muhammad (drawing from poems in like *Maulid Al Barjanzi*, *Qasida Al-Burdah*). In sisingaan in Subang, West Java circumcised boys ride atop a lion-like palanquin carried by four men doing steps in the style of pencak silat martial arts to an orchestra of two drums (kendang), three small gongs (ketuk), metal plates (ketrek) and shawm (trompet) (Hellman, 2006; Rosidi, 2000; Cooper, 2001; Triyanto et. al., 2016; Tan, 2019). During my research in West Java in the 1970s and 1980s, I often encountered such leonine/animal effigies for circumcision entertainments. In the following evening the celebration might be augmented by a display of martial dance, with sparring and a bit of clowning added.

I link *burok* to variety of entertainments that combine animal figures, dance, music, clowning, and martial display and feats (firewalking, seeming invulnerability to weapons). Such forms are popular along the north coast, the highlands of Sunda, East Java, and beyond. They of course also relate to Balinese barong figures which are paraded by groups of young men as part of the new year celebrations and have since the 1930s become enmeshed in trance genres like *calonarang* where the lion figure is paired with the mask of *Calonarang*, a widow-witch related to Durga of the Hindu-Buddhist cosmology (Catra & Foley, 2022). So, though such forms of humans linked to animal may have earlier indigenous roots and trans-Buddhist world roots, it has been augmented by Chinese martial influences. These are forms in which the animal is a protective figure that may be likened to a young man at the height of physical development and who must learn to use strength in ways

that are protective for the community rather than allowing a potential for power and violence to wound. These forms relate to a wide pattern of lion dances throughout Asia, a genre that is particularly strong where Chinese culture has had influence including Korea and Japan. The association of the feline with tiger/ancestor—as seen in the association of Prabu Siliwangi and his entourage with tigers—is also an element in Indonesian displays (Wessing, 1986, 2006; Boomgaard, 2001).

A related figure-dance using a horse is part of the broad animal-human imagery of performing arts, but I argue is also related to Persian-Mughal Muslim roots. For example, in Sumedang the circumcision processional displays often involve *kuda renggong* with the circumcised boy mounted on an actual dancing horse. In other horse/animal dances kuda lumping (leather horse) or *kuda kepang* (woven bamboo horse), *jaranan* (horse) or *jatihlan*, young men (or today young girls) dance holding a horse puppet figure executing a graceful, set group choreography which may be followed by the same dancers or others doing feats (opening coconuts with teeth, gulping buckets of water, firewalking, etc.) as the head of the group uses incense to help performers in and out of trance (Kartomi, 1973; Foley, 1985; Groenendael, 2008; Richter, 2008; Hardwick, 2014; Rapoport, 2018 & 2020). Other helpers intervene to control the "horses" and often one of these helpers will often play a clownish role. The evening progresses from lighthearted group choreography to more dangerous feats, while the troupe leader (*seh*, *pawang*) with his whip (*pecut*), prayer, and incense maintains control, bringing performers out of trance when the atmosphere becomes too fraught or someone seems beyond control. Given that the horse dancers are sometimes said to be Hussein's calvary at Karbala, I argue that the horse parades and especially the link of horse-feats, self-flagellation, martial encounter, and young male performance can be associated in part with rites of Muharram in Shi'a religious practice.

Other forms using figures of animals may be related to Chinese lion dance: *reak* in Indramayu has a dancer in a body puppet representing a lion or other wild beast appearing with the Pentul the pink-faced, pug-nosed clown of the Cirebon mask dance (*topeng cirebon*) (Tan, 2019; Pringgodigdo, 1982). Comic repartee, trance behavior, and an improvised fight of the pair enliven the event. In Bandung bangbarongan has a burlap costumed animal with a leonine mask danced at circumcisions and Independence day celebrations:

> While widely recognized as popular entertainment, it also conveys profound messages through its symbolic elements. The musical instruments used in Bangbarongan performances, such as tilingtit, tong, bedug, and brung, hold philosophical meanings closely tied to religiosity. For instance, tilingtit

> symbolizes a reminder to act cautiously in life, while bedug emphasizes the importance of prayer, serving as a call to worship Allah SW. (Al-Mufid, 2025)

In studying martial arts in Bandung in the late 1970s through the 1980s with my teachers including Herman Suwanda, I was told pencak silat was a combination of Javanese and Chinese training exercises/performing (and of course Sunan Kalijaga might be evoked as using it in conversions). I would sometimes accompany the group to performances at circumcision ceremonies. The evening would start with the slow group dances ("*Paleredan*", "*Tepak Dua*") and proceed to more exciting displays using faster drumming ("*Tepak Tilu*") where performers would do silat in monkey (*monyet*) or tiger (*macan*) style (sometimes said to be entranced by the spirit of the animal). The evening would then end up in sparring with the fastest dumming ("*Padungdung*") enlivening and the troupe masters demonstrating in the last few rounds. Often one of the participants would be a semi-comic fighter/figure who could also serve as a kind of master of ceremonies and help keep of control—intervening if matches became too heated. This general progression—slow more meditative opening, acceleration and animalesque antics with mixing in comedy, culminating in major fight also forms the dramatic structure of many entertainments including wayang puppetry/dance drama and topeng mask dance.

The animal in these forms is associated with youth (mostly but not always young men) and overseen by an older male teacher (sometimes assuming the role of MC, drummer, and/or featured performer). A relation between the animal dancers and a clownish sideman with a care-taking interaction repeat. Movement in these martial arts dances may also link with animals: the common stance of the standard male position in Sundanese dance is *kuda-kuda* (horse stance), the basic martial arts posture for *pencak silat*. The feet are a perhaps half a meter apart and the dancer is grounded plié stance (as if riding a horse)—a position which will allow the average dancer to remain upright even if there is a direct blow to the chest. Other movements may emulate animals: a relaxed hand used to grab and twist and arm is part of the monkey style which relates to dance movement in Jawa such as the ucul (rotation of wrists), while clawing is part of tiger style.

These diverse entertainments have many of the features of lion dance in Chinese culture. The "animal" *borak* or *sisingaan* palanquin; the body puppet of the reak/reog, barongan, or the real or puppetlike horse in kuda renggong and kuda lumping/kepang/jaranan/jatihlan repeats as the performer, often a young male, rides on or dances inside it. While I have acknowledged earlier that the image of the lion is found in Hindu cultures (Emigh, 1996) and moved throughout Asia with Buddhism, Chinese lions as figures of blessings

and associated with martial arts groups have been very influential in East and Southeast Asia due to Sinitic waves (Foley, 2016). All the performing genres I have discussed in this animal dance section combine martial arts, exorcism/blessing, and a male-marked athleticism.

In Java the close association of the lion figure with the young male is most marked in the moment of circumcision—when the youth move from child with little control over self and emotion to the disciplined male adult. This entertainment has become a part of a rite of passage—of reaching Muslim adulthood in Indonesian cultures. The martial-animal metaphor and Islamic thinking are on display. The boy that rides the *borak*, the dancer that plays the sometimes disorderly *barong* but also becomes the martial protector of community, the large group of young males who ride the horse figures in *kuda kepang*—all demonstrate how energy is focused to benefit rather than harm a community. Riding and dancing these animal figures is a sign of Muslim male coming-of-age: Chinese martial arts connections have been melded with the moment of becoming a male Muslim adult in Java and Sunda. Though such genres are sometimes condemned by contemporary ulama as *syirk* (شِرْك), they have long had an Islamic as well as Chinese connection.

Conclusion

Looking at the arts on the island of Java those who know Pesisir culture will feel demands that the Hejaz be seen as the prime historical influence on Indonesian Islam is a myth created to aid cultural-political recalibration for contemporary Sunni thinking. Historians and scholars of religion such as Johns (1961, 1995), Bruinessen (1990), Lombard and Saloman (1993), Feener (1998), Ricklefs (2006), Laffan (2011), Ricci (2011), Wain (2017) among others have led the way in a pointing toward more diversified evaluation which includes Chinese and Persians as part of conversion and practices of Islam in the archipelago.

Since the 1970s more Javanese have been taking part as guest workers in the oil rich sites of the Middle East as a way to support families. Meanwhile religious training in schools which Saudi support has wrought changes in perception and values (veils, covering *aurat*, mandatory rather than fasting by choice, etc.)—ideas that were not the norm of generations past. Increased middle class access to Haj which normally demands more observant visible markers of being Muslim post-pilgrimage has likewise had impact. Wars on terror, conflicts in the Middle East, and Islamic globalization of a strict Sunni ummah has fed contemporary cultural wars. The idea of Chinese and Persians who in early iterations were global trade partner on the maritime silk road, morphed in the late colonial period into a later image of Chinese as a colonialist-serving, moneyed middle men partnering with Dutch. More

recently, the association of Chinese with "communist" was a aspect of 1950s and 1960s which under Suharto led to the banning of Chinese cultural markers from the 1960s-1990s. *Kafir*-Communist-Confucian stereotyping of Chinese has marked Chinese as the "Jews" of the east for average minds of the recent era.

Such stereotyping overlooks the aspects of traditional performance, visual culture, history, and legend which support nuanced understanding of strong influences from China and Persia which are part of making Indonesian Islam, especially via the arts, during the era of Islamization. The links to Chinese and Persians in tales of the Wali, of the Chinese women, and evocation of inner lions are strong and attest to Chinese and Shi'a influences in Islamization. These are part of a synthesis that developed as locals along with Hui Chinese immigrants and Persians from central Asia developed a Muslim coastal culture which was then shared with inland Java. This maritime mix also involved continued interplay with mainland southeast Asia (Malaysia, Southern Thailand, Champa/Vietnam). Muslim ideas and arts entered the north coast of Java on sea routes. Port cities were crucial site for dakwah of the inland empires. Wide-traveling Javanese went north to China and as well as west to the Hejaz and traded not just wares, but religious ideas and artistic practices of Islam, including wood culture, mosque architecture, puppetry, body figures of lions and lore of mixed marriages. Chinese and Persian Muslims participated as conversion around the Gulf of Thailand/South China Sea moved due to the trade and religious entanglement. Islam Nusantara is a hybrid of Javanese, Sundanese, Chinese, Persian, Hejaz Islamic thought.

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