



South and Southeast Asia Culture and Religion

The SSEASR Journal

South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Culture and Religion
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From the Editorial Board

We are extremely happy to see the fourth issue of the SSEASR Journal coming out. It took this year long to finalise the publication due to the late submission of the corrected/improved files from the respective writers. The Board also waited for long to shape up this issue. However, we pledge, the next issue of the Journal would be released in the month of March only.

The articles selected for this issue are mostly from those who had presented their papers at the 3rd SSEASR Conference, Bali. But as stated frequently by us, our Journal seeks articles and research work from any scholar working on the subject related to the study of culture and religion of any part of South and Southeast Asia. Some of the articles therefore reflect upon this desirability of ours.

We have added the abstract and keywords before each the article. It would help the reader to grasp the main focus of the article concerned, and would also add up to our standard.

As you happen to see this Volume, our parent organisation International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) is going to hold its 20th Quinquennial World Congress this year in mid-August at Toronto. We expect a larger participation from our region. At the same time, you should also not forget the forthcoming 4th SSEASR Conference, Thimphu, Bhutan in late June 2011. We all wish you happy conference experience in the coming months!

May 2010

Editorial Board: Brief Introduction

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Being a **peered review Journal**, it may take five to six months to know the outcome of such submission. Book Reviews submitted should relate only to the books published in the past two years.

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SSEASR: AN INTRODUCTION

The SSEASR stands to bring out the genius of the local regional scholarship which generally remains deep buried in international academics. It is for creating a network of scholars in the South and Southeast Asia and to develop healthy academic atmosphere in the region. The SSEASR cooperates with the related agencies in the region. In recent times, Asian scholars have started to 'work *within* Asia; such trends would be further promoted by the SSEASR among Asian scholars who need exposure to the high standard of research being conducted at world's various competent academic institutions. Thus, the SSEASR offers native scholars, writers and artists on culture and religion a platform to join the international fraternity.

The objective of the SSEASR is pursued by means of scholarly activities such as the organisation of conferences, symposia or colloquia; the encouragement of research publications; exchange of information through various means, and such other activities as the association or its elected officer determine time to time.

For the benefit of its members, the SSEASR also stands to promote regular academic exchanges and study tours to the Asian countries. Such tours can be specifically organised for the SSEASR members to enhance their knowledge of the culture and religion of the region. For more details, one can visit www.sseasr.org

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Javanese Muslims' Tolerance and Flexibility through Syncretic Ornamentation

Hee Sook Lee-Niinioja

Abstract

Java, located on the southern Indonesian archipelago, has rich cultural heritage. Although Islam became the dominant religion in the 16th century, the basic patterns of ancestral, mythical belief and Hindu-Buddhism were integrated within Sufi Islam which had lost much of its orthodoxy on its spread from the Arab world. As Sufi believed mosques to be sacred, the holy pre-Islamic architecture and ornaments became a means for Islamisation, creating a combination of indigenous and Islamic ideas and forms with a distinct regionalism. Consequently, roofs of old mosques resemble the Cosmos Mountain, Meru, the abode of gods, while pre-Islamic motifs decorate mosque mihrabs. The political and Islamic movement in Java is divided into three periods: transitory (15c-1619), Dutch colonisation (1619-1945), and contemporary (1945-present). Each period created syncretism between regional tradition and incoming Islamic culture, based on mutual tolerance and flexibility. These steps are (1) parallelism between old and new culture, (2) adaptation between the two, and (3) creation of a new syncretic culture. Based on these facts, (1) the paper discusses of syncretic ornaments whether their ideas and forms were inherited from pre-Islamic or Islamic tradition. (2) It identifies how three stages of Islamisation have developed in mosque ornamentation. (3) It suggests how the tolerance and flexibility of Javanese Muslims can contribute to enhance communications between different faiths and religions at the current times.

Keywords: Java, Syncretism, Islam, Architecture, Colonisation

Regional Flavour

Regionalism looks for sustaining spiritual forces and refuses to accept that a tradition is a fixed set of devices and images. It deals with climate, local materials and geography in epochs before the arrival of

Oxford Brookes University, Helsinki, Finland

Islam. The aim is to unravel the layers, to see how indigenous archetypes have been transformed by invading forms, and in turn to see how foreign imports have been adapted to the cultural soil. Beyond the particular, the regionalist tries to see the type, the general law, the originating principles.¹



Figure 1: Map of Java

Islamic culture and art have been influenced and remodelled by local traditions with countries which they came into contact, in order to comply with its religious and philosophical ideas. This interaction has enriched both the material culture of the Muslim world and those pre-existing ones.² Despite keeping the Islamic principles in unity, gradual stylistic changes occurred thus the regional, social, and temporal variations in Islamic art and architecture should be studied in detail.³

Today, Southeast Asia (the Malay) including Java represents almost one-quarter of Islam's global community. Islamic civilization is inextricably linked to the message of the Prophet since its arrival to Java in the early 15th century⁴. Islam not only altered local cultural

¹ Curtis 1985, p.74

² Rogers 2005, p.9

³ Grabar 1987, p.185; Baer 1998, p.129

⁴ The arrival of Islam in Indonesia is still disputed. The first assumption is that Islam was directly originated from Mecca or Arabia since the seventh century, based on the Chinese source of *Hsin.T'ang Shu*. A Ta-shih Muslim community which settled at the coast of Sumatra had a plan to attack the Ho-ling kingdom under the reign of Queen Sima in Java in 674 (Groenveldt 1960, p.14). The other assumption is that Sufi Islam came to Indonesia in the 13th century from Iraq, Persia, and India when Baghdad was attacked by the Mongols under Hulagu in 1258, thus the old route during the Persian Gulf via Baghdad to the ports of Syria and Asia Minor was replaced by the new one from Aden along the Red Sea to Alexandria, Egypt. This theory is sustained by the find of a gravestone of Sultan Malik as-Salih (1297) from

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landscapes, but also created a unique regional heritage. It could be asked why a characteristic regionalism had to take place greatly in this archipelago. Was it due to the awareness of continuing Javanese cultural heritage? This can be claimed that the geographical long distance between the Arab world and Southeast Asia prevented the direct influence of Islamic centre into this region at the beginning.⁵

Consequently, the expression of faith in art and architecture articulated the creed of Islam and produced complexity of regional variations. Two factors can be argued to create the regionalism. Firstly, living in a spirit of tolerance, flexibility, and openness, the Malay people were able to accept changes through careful selection, reflection, and modification without discarding their wealthy cultural traditions. They witnessed Hindu-Buddhist, Chinese, Islamic, and western cultures, which had a great impact on the lifestyle. Secondly, the arrival of Islam to the archipelago coincided with an era of zealous spiritualism in the Islamic world. Sufi mysticism had first appeared in Persia, and following the Mongol seizure of Baghdad in 1258, it rapidly spread through international trade routes.⁶ As the Sufi precept of 'universal toleration' could negotiate with pre-Islamic culture, a new Malay identity was quickly expressed in Malay art to affirm 'oneness of God'. Artists drew inspiration from diverse heritage and chose to transform existing symbolism in accordance with Islam.⁷

Moreover, the close relationship between the rulers and Islam was spatially symbolized by placing Javanese palaces adjacent to the grand mosque and the town's centre. The common heritage in many mosques reflects the close political relationship between Muslim rulers in different regions. Shared features are the tripartite division (base, main body, superstructure), a centralized plan, multi-tiered roof, soko guru (four master columns), mustaka (crown), an outer colonnade, sermabi (veranda), a walled courtyard with two gateways, drum, and graveyard.⁸

Gampong Samudra (Moquette 1913, pp.1-15).

⁵ Bennett 2005 and interview, November, 2006

⁶ Bennett 2005, pp.22-7

⁷ Yatin 2005, pp.104-5

⁸ Fontein 1990, p.60. Serambi which was used in Indonesian houses for public events, was later introduced to mosque as an additional space for *wayang* (shadow puppet) plays and other activities during Islamisation. The serambi is not sacred in a Javanese mosque setting, due to its origin contrasted to sacred mosques. Javanese believe that the soul of ancestors as shadows could be invoked by a sacred ritual. Hindu-Buddhist stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were accommodated into the world of *wayang*, which Islam adopted. Due to the flexibility with the



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Figure 2: Regional Indonesian mosques with multi-tiered roofs

From Agung Demak Java (1479) - Lubuk Bauk Sumatra - Sultan Abdurahman Kalimantan - Tua Pulau Ternate the Moluccas to Pondok Indah (1997) Java

Until the late 19th century, mosques were constructed in a vernacular style with Hindu-Buddhist multi-tiered roof, using mostly wood to accommodate local conditions. The persistence of indigenous buildings had to take into account the local profusion of natural resources and variable climates, resulting in exuberant and diverse architectural styles. Elements associated with Islamic architecture elsewhere, such as the dome and geometric ornament, do not feature in these traditions. Multi-tiered roofs are the most suitable for tropical weather against heavy rain and humidity⁹, while soko guru supports the uppermost roof, separating it from the double-layered outer roof, in order to admit light and to allow ventilation of the prayer hall.¹⁰

As pre-Islamic traditions underline the form and setting of sacred places, mystical Sufis borrowed them, based on their belief of mosques to be sacred, creating a combination of indigenous and Islamic ideas and forms in mosque architecture.¹¹ Three-tiered roof symbolises the mystical paths to God.¹² Soko guru signifies the spiritual context of the vertical unity between God and his believers, continued from the Hindu belief in the identity of self and the universal soul.¹³

Hindu stories and the foresight of *wali songo* (nine saints), Islam was concretized into the less modified but still predominant Hindu mythology. *Wayang* became a universal cultural value and ethics (Boedjardjo 1978, p.119).

⁹ Noe'man and Fanani, interviews, 2005

¹⁰ O'Neill 1994, pp.227-33

¹¹ Tjahjono 1998, pp.87-9

¹² A 'three concept' connects to Meru, the Cosmos Mountain whose appearance seems to be a triangular shape. In Hindu-Buddhism, the concept represents 'underworld, world, and heaven'. Javanese Islam adopted this idea into a three-tiered roof of a mosque building, signifying three ways to be a good Muslim: 'faith, Islam, and charity' (Tjandrasasmita, interviews, 2004-6). (1) The lowest roof represents Shariah as Islamic Law, (2) the second as Tariqah, a way to get Allah's blessing, (3) the third as Hakikah – the spirit of a Muslim's good deed, and (4) mustaka at the top as Marifah to know Allah (Suryo, "Traditional Javanese Mosque", *Romantika Arkeologia*).

¹³ Isnaeni 1996, pp.158-232

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According to a Malay perspective, art is likely to function as delight and purity. A main difference between Islamic art and Malay art is the level of religious values inherent in the artefacts. Despite the influence of pre-Islamic beliefs and art forms on the pattern of life in Southeast Asia, a bond between Islam and local culture has been steadfast, because existing influences encouraged Malay people to accept the Islamic ideologies to develop a distinctive regional art. The concept of 'Godliness' of their ancestors and the primary aesthetics of cosmological belief in Malay were penetrated into Islamic cosmology in a form of syncretic culture.¹⁴

Although the avoidance of figurative representation separates Islamic art from Hindu-Buddhist aesthetic style, Islamic art needed reconciliation of the ambivalent relationship between the two religions, caused by the ruler's indigenous belief of the magic in art. Accordingly, the depiction of non-Islamic images, such as Hindu deity Ganesha or zoomorphic and anthropomorphic symbols combined by Koranic calligraphy was to be understood in the context of the earlier animism. This method was intended to represent non-Islamic images fitting into an aesthetic attitude tolerable to Islamic orthodoxy.¹⁵

Among many types of pre-Islamic motifs which appeared in Javanese mosques, kala-makara (fish and elephant trunk) and floral motifs seemed to continue the most, particularly lotus flower¹⁶. Islamic poets describe flower as a book, where one can study the knowledge about God. And its combination with birds can be considered as the characteristic of Islamic Javanese decorative art, despite a ban by the *hadith*.¹⁷

¹⁴ Yatin 2005, pp.105-8

¹⁵ Bennett 2005, pp.251-2; Tjandrasasmita 1984 and interview, 2005

¹⁶ van der Hoop 1949, p.106, p.160. In India, kala was often taken to be a lion's head (*kirtimukha*, *banspati*), but in Indonesia it merged into a human face or a demon's head. The kala head with the swollen eye and tusk appears over arch at Javanese Hindu-Buddhist temple, while a pair of makaras by curving outwards terminates at the bottom of a gatepost. The makara, an imaginary animal with the shape of a fish and the trunk of an elephant, was introduced into Indonesia during Hinduisation. Referring to the origin of the *kala*, Subarna, an Indonesian scholar specialising in indigenous art, insists that a similar type had already made an appearance in the prehistoric period in Indonesia (interview, November, 2004).

¹⁷ Marwoto 2003, pp.315-76. The Koran has no message about art and architecture, although it is uncompromising with regard to idolatry: 'Believers, wine and games of chance, idols and divining arrows are abominations devised by Satan. Avoid them, so that you may prosper' (surah 5:95) (Yeomans 1999, p.16). The bird motif, called *buraq*, is favoured by Cirebon batiks as a messenger of the Prophet (Kahfiati, interview, June, 2006).



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Van Leur in his book Indonesian *Trade and Society* (1960) argues that Indonesian history must be understood in its own terms, not in those borrowed from other cultures. This view seems to be shared by others: 'We are Javanese, then, our religion is Islam'¹⁸ Tjandrasmita (1984) attempted to prove that Islam took over local conditions and, to a certain extent, contributed to the preservation of indigenous cultural values and traditions. This could be due to the fact that the Islamic propagators and the Indonesian themselves have always known tolerance, which is not only obvious in architecture and decorative art, but is also in other aspects of their culture. For instance, Astana Mantingan (1559) in Central Java and Sendang Duwur (1561) in East Java exhibit a blend of Hindu-Javanese and Islamic cultural elements, indicating a close relationship between Hindu Majapahit and Islamic cities on the coast. He stressed the importance of ornaments in integrating Islam into Javanese culture, encouraging artists to adjust gradually to new realities, instead of putting any imposition on them¹⁹.

Prijotomo (2004) underlines a combination of pre-Islamic and Islamic ideas and forms in floral decoration at Sendang Duwur: 'It is not a real floral, but a modified one, seen as floral. This ambiguity is a Javanese characteristic. Javanese mosques use Hindu-Buddhist motifs in an Islamic way. The form is Hindu, but the idea is Islamic, or vice versa. As Islam allows liberty, everybody can make their own style, but keeping continuity'. Islam penetrated slowly into Indonesian minds without force, due to its principal concept. Sendang Duwur reflects the process of acculturation with tolerance, syncretism, local genius, friendship of the Javanese in the transitory period. It is the earliest product of the Islamic Indonesian art.

Islamic art became an extension, rather than a radical change from earlier aesthetic traditions. These comments raise a question: what is the unique Javanese attitude to Islamic culture?

The answer can be found in Kusno's article (2003).²⁰ He argues that Java was the centre of the universe before the arrival of Islam, but on facing Islam, Java was aware of its own limit. In order to keep a religious balance, the Javanese Muslims had to localize orthodox Islamic culture to continuing traditional symbolism smoothly, thus they

¹⁸ Prijotomo, interview, 2004

¹⁹ The medallions of Hindu-Buddhist lotus or the tree of life on the wall of Mantingan (1559) is round and oblong in shape. Stutterheim, Bergema, and others had the opinion that the tree of life is both related to the Cosmos Mountain in Hinduism and the life in paradise in Islam (Tjandrasmita 1985, p.22).

²⁰ Kusno 2003, pp. 57-67



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could feel that the centre would not have to shift so radically. As a result, constructing the syncretic mosque of Agung Demak (1479) is likely to represent the power of the new faith in Java from the viewpoint of Islam, but Islam has been localized and incorporated to become an element within the larger cultural framework of Java from the Javanese perspective. Java was not merely part of Islam, but Islam was art of Java or Javanese life. This philosophy has continued until five centuries later. A Javanese architect named Mintobudoyo designed Soko Tunggal (1973) at Taman Sari in Central Java. The mosque has a single column, supporting four corner beams of the upper roof. The architect's intention was to construct a focus, a vertical centre that represents the 'unity' of the Javanese and the Islamic world. The vertical column pays tribute to the global Islam, while the horizontal spread of the four Javanese master pillars confirms the existence of the local power.

Surprisingly, the mosque orients itself to the east, away from qibla, and any deviation from this direction for a mosque would violate the Javanese rule. Indicated by a group of architectural historians in Indonesia, the architect clarified that it is Java which is at the centre of the whole negotiation, and his idea was accepted. This story shows how the transformation of Javanese Islam and its architectural form is inseparable from the social and economic contexts.

As a whole, the Islamic cultural heritage reflects unity in diversity in Southeast Asia where Java belongs to. In appreciating its development, one should be mindful of the context of the multicultural societies which created an extraordinarily rich practice through the integration of tradition, ethnicity, geographical space and belief. It was due to the inspiration of the Malay people which has played the most significant force in creating a regional Islamic culture and Malay identity in this archipelago.²¹

Three Islamic Periods

Islamic Java can be divided into three distinct periods: (i) continuation of pre-Islamic influence in the transitory period (15C-1619), (ii) European and Islamic influences during Dutch colonisation of Java (1619-1945), and (iii) a pure Islamic movement in the contemporary period (1945-to the present), caused by the political and religious movements, although other invasions - Chinese, Portuguese, British, and Japanese - brought lesser changes in the island.²²

²¹ Bennett 2005, p.254

²² Tjandrasasmita, interview, March, 2005. For Fanani, an Indonesian architect,



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A few Indonesian scholars, such as Tjandrasasmita, Anbary, and Sedyawati relate that Islamic art and architecture were brought by traders and ulamas (religious teachers), not by cultural people around the 12th century. As foreign missionaries did not possess skills on making Islamic ornaments, instead, they focused on explaining the principles of the religion to local people. A poor execution of calligraphy on the earlier gravestones is probably an example of the limited skills that were transferred. This tradition spread further, and local genius started to create new motifs after modification of existing ones with Islamic context. The first syncretic ornaments are called 'local or Malay Islamic ornaments', differed from the orthodox Islamic ones.

Around the 18th century during Dutch colonisation, Javanese Muslims were much more able to make the journey to Mecca as pilgrims and started to learn about orthodox Islamic ornament, finding them more beautiful than what they had at home. Eventually, they brought them home, and started adapting them into local ornamentation and cultural context, thus the creation of the second syncretism occurred. Following Indonesian independence in 1945, any Muslim could travel to everywhere and learn pan-Islamic ornament, repeating the same process, and inventing the third syncretism. It can be said that each period had its Malay Islamic ornament.²³

To this, another reason was given:²⁴

If Muslim missionaries who had brought their Islamic architecture and ornament wanted to introduce them here, at first, they could not be accepted, because we had already our own architecture, such as a stepped roof, and ornaments, based on geographical and ecological experiences which should be continued.

Whatever the case was, the assimilation of Islamic ornaments into local culture was caused by the flexibility and tolerance of both Islam and the Javanese people.²⁵ And different views imply the lack of a full research on Islamic culture.²⁶

three divisions can be: stage i (1000-1650), ii (1650-1900), iii (1900-2000) in a viewpoint from the Islamic movement in Java.

²³ Fanani, interview, September, 2006

²⁴ Tjandrasasmita 1984, p.57 and interview, August, 2006

²⁵ Anbary and Tjandrasasmita, interviews, 2006

²⁶ Many debates, such as on the introduction of Islam to Indonesia, or the origin of Javanese mosques, occurred over time. They are caused by the lack of written original sources inherited from ingenious people, and a tendency of tackling these



The Transitory Period (1479-1619)



Figure 3: Agung Demak (1479), Demak, Central Java

The Islamic transitory period starts from the foundation of the earliest Islamic kingdom of Demak around 1479 after the conquest over Hindu Majapahit kingdom, and ends with the beginning of Dutch colonisation of Java in 1619. During this time, remnants of Hindu-Buddhist influence were very visible in Javanese mosques. Three kingdoms arose in sequence: Demak on the coast, Pajang and Mataram in the inland of Central Java. According to Javanese chronicles and oral traditions, the main aim for struggling Islam from the coastal Demak to the inland Mataram was to gain legitimacy over Majapahit. At this time, mosques served both as places for prayer and for showing Islamic power over Hindu-Buddhism. After the foundation of Demak, Muslims strove to declare Islamic power dominant, and Islam reached its supremacy during the rule of Sultan Agung (r.1613-45) of Mataram.²⁷ Although Mataram and its spiritual sovereignty existed until Indonesian independence in 1945, the death of Sultan Agung in 1646 marked a starting point of a decline in the political power of Javanese rulers. During the Islamisation, a few Islamic centres were founded along with the coast (pasisir) in Central and West Java, such as Kudus, Jepara, Cirebon, Banten, Gresik, and Surabaya, keeping a close contact with Demak and sharing the pre-Islamic syncretic culture.²⁸

The tradition says that the oldest mosques were likely re-used buildings within palaces or small prayer halls in villages. They modelled on existing building types used for a similar sacral purpose.

matters in a specific viewpoint, rather than a wider perspective approach among scholars (Tjandrasasmita, interview, 2005).

²⁷ Under Sultan Agung, the decorative arts rejuvenated. Agung sought to strengthen his authority in the state and to endow his monarchy great influence and prestige. The motifs used during the kingdom are Hindu-Javanese prototypes (Wagner 1959, pp.148-9). Islam had little impact on Javanese philosophy, but changed some basic social customs, such as circumcision and burial, replacing Hindu-Buddhist cremation (Ricklefs 1993, p.13).

²⁸ Isnaeni 1996, pp.181-92. By the beginning of the 16th century, Gujarati merchants had trading posts in all the important commercial centres in South East Asia (Schrieke 1957, pp.233-4).

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The four main columns (soko guru) support the uppermost roof, separating it from the double-layered outer roof, in order to admit light and to allow ventilation of the prayer hall. The earliest large mosques are venerated as the oldest of their kind in Southeast Asia, and the first mosque is said to be Agung Demak (1479). Despite its renovation and reconstruction in the 19th and 20th centuries, the present form of this mosque still resembles the original one, becoming a standard for the mosque building later.²⁹

The only mosque tower is located in a pilgrimage town of Kudus (Arabic: al-Quds), whose mosque has the tomb of the wali Sunan Kudus. The structure of the tower closely resembles that of Hindu Majapahit, and recalls the kul-kul towers of Balinese villages. The tower contains a cylindrical drum to be beaten for calling prayer as a common tradition.³⁰ The mosque complex reflects the style of Hindu-Buddhist temples in East Java, surrounded by walls and located in the middle of the site with a prayer hall, soko guru, and tiered roof. The shift of political power from the coastal to inland kingdoms brought a movement of Islam and its culture from a trading to an agrarian basis, but the basic elements of the mosque still remained.³¹

The Dutch Colonisation Era (1619-1945)



Figure 4: Hidayatullah (1750), Jakarta, West Java

During the last decades of the 16th century, English and Dutch ships began to explore Southeast Asia. To strengthen international trade, a European administration was set in place to regulate production in response to the demands of their home markets. Although the official start of Dutch colonisation of Java was on 30 May in 1619 when Jayakarta³² fell by J. P. Coen, the Dutch had already influenced the courts of Central Java. Traders, such as Acehnese, Javanese, Arab, and Indian, from any part of the Muslim world settled down harbours in Sumatra, Banten, Batavia and Surabaya in Java,

²⁹ O'Neill 1994, p.233

³⁰ Ambariyanto 1998, p.209

³¹ Isnaeni 1996, pp.181-92

³² Historically, Jakarta bears many names: Sunda Kelapa, Jayakarta, and Batavia.

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forming communities with mosques as their life focus. Rather small in scale, the previous traditional Hindu-Buddhist style was still echoed in mosques. Agung Palembang (Sumatra), Kebun Jeruk, Angke, and Jami (Jakarta) have a similar profile in a traditional pyramidal roof and soko guru. A wide range of ornaments of Middle Eastern and Indian, sometimes of European and Chinese or even regional inspiration, were applied to the doors and windows and details of masonry walls.³³

The collapse of the Dutch East Indian Company at the end of the 18th century and a short British administration for seven years from 1811 provided an opportunity for the Dutch government to control Java from 1818. It was this decade that the first Mogul dome of Baiturrachman (1881) was built by the Dutch in Aceh, combined with the local serambi, and was further introduced in Javanese mosques. Towards the end of the 19th century, however, European liberal movements against injustices in the colonies brought interest in their indigenous culture and religious life, neglected by the ruling government. As a result, in the early 20th century, existing Javanese mosques began renovations by the support of the Dutch, and large new mosques, such as those in Bandung and Semarang, were sited on the public squares. A departure from local tradition was seen in the addition of a freestanding tower(s), and an iron tower surmounted by an Indian style dome was built alongside the old mosque in Demak.³⁴

The Contemporary Period (1945-to the Present Day)

From the end of the 19th century, new directions in theological education and social reform throughout the Islamic Arab world

³³ The Chinese contributed to the development of Javanese culture. Their contacts with Indonesian island were as early as the fifth century. However, traders from the southern provinces of China and the coast of Campa (now Vietnam) became active in Java and the southern Archipelago in the 15th century. The tales of the Malay Annals of Semarang and Cirebon give rise to the assumption that Chinese Muslim traders and artisans lived in business quarters around mosques. Huge quantities of Chinese cash and earthenware were imported into Java (de Graff and Pigeaud 1984, pp.171-6; Dawson and Gillow 1994, p.8). The most distinct Chinese influence in ornamentation was curvilinear meanders and cloud motifs, shown on the relief of the Hindu Panataran temple complex in Majapahit. In Cirebon, Chinese motifs of cloud and rock were incorporated into the designs of palaces and mosques, and displayed in the gateway to the Kasepuhan Palace (Wagner 1959, p.148; Soemantri 1998, pp.14-5). Compared to their active colonisation of Indonesia, Europeans did not leave a permanent mark on Islamic mosques in Java (Wertheim 1956, pp.281-2). European motifs of palmette, crown, tulip and lily flower are sporadically shown in mosques, particularly on glazed tiles or carved wood. It was the Dutch who brought paints into Indonesian mosques during their colonisation.

³⁴ O'Neill 1994, pp.263-7



introduced alternative architectural styles which emanated from Cairo and Arabia. They were somehow accepted in Java, but were resisted by other nationalistic sections of the ummat. After Independence in 1945, this trend was reversed in a movement towards solidarity among Muslim nations and the development of a combination of Javanese and international styles in variety, in the context of modern technology and characteristic design. An extensive 'Islamic' building program was initiated by President Sukarno and continued by President Soeharto of Indonesia during the early 1980s. Sukarno wanted to build the National Mosque, Masjid Istiqlal, which would accommodate 20,000 at prayer inside and 100,000 in its courtyards. Interestingly, in this case Javanese traditions were totally disregarded by his obsession with the mosque to rival all others in the Islamic world. Instead, the centralized domed space of the 14th century Ottoman architecture was taken as a mode.³⁵



Figure 5: Al Akbar Surabaya (1995-2000), Surabaya, East Java

During the period of Soeharto, a traditional but a strictly functional design prevailed in more than 400 mosque buildings throughout the country. The government-sponsored foundation Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila³⁶ offered a standard design to be used for a mosque building in less advantaged areas: a basic plan with a three-tiered roof, available in three sizes (15, 17 or 19 m²). Although its model was old Agung Demak, the absence of soko guru in a new mosque design denies the metaphorical role of linking the believers to Allah.³⁷ A dome-like structure would appear to be discouraged by this official foundation. Perhaps this is a way to resist change and to retain cultural

³⁵ O'Neill 1993, pp.16-8

³⁶ Pancasila is the official philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state. Pancasila consists of two Sanskrit words, "panca" meaning five, and "sila" meaning principles. It comprises five principles held to be inseparable and interrelated: (1) Belief in the one and only God, (2) Just and civilized humanity, (3) The unity of Indonesia, (4) Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives, and (5) Social justice for the all of the people of Indonesia. Department of Information, Republic of Indonesia, an Official Handbook 1999.

³⁷ O'Neill 1994, pp.259-60

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identity amidst the challenge of other images for a mosque such as that of a dome or a flat roof.³⁸

The expansion of population has brought about the need for many larger mosque complexes in recent years, and designs from the Middle East, India, and North Africa have taken over local traditions. The absence of mihrab was seen at Pondok Indah (1998) in Jakarta. The less popular flat roof was adopted at Salman (1974) in Bandung following the Western functionalism. Yet young designers are also searching for a more authentic architecture responsive to the local environment, such as Adhi Moersid who built Said Naum (1977).³⁹ Moreover, details on several mosques still reflect their predecessors in the use of material or structural method, to continue their cultural heritage. Consequently, in this cosmopolitan atmosphere, uncertainties arise for local architects or ulamas who are attempting to advise on the appropriate Islamic forms.

In short, in the transitory period, significant continuity of pre-Islamic tradition was shown, while European and Islamic influences on Javanese mosques took place gradually during Dutch colonisation. Toward the contemporary era, pan-Islamic motifs replaced those existing elements. However, a tendency to continue the traditional cultural heritage is still seen, creating a characteristic regional style in both architecture and ornamentation.

Parallelism, Adaptation, and Creation of a New Syncretic Culture

It is mentioned that the political and Islamic movement in Java is divided into three periods: transitory (15c-1619), Dutch colonisation (1619-1945), and contemporary (1945-present). Each period created syncretism between regional tradition and incoming Islamic culture, based on mutual tolerance and flexibility. These steps are (1) parallelism between old and new culture, (2) adaptation between the two, and (3) creation of a new syncretic culture.

³⁸ Saliya, Hariadi and Tjahjono 1990, pp.192-3

³⁹ O'Neill 1994, pp.239-40; Saliya, Hariadi and Tjahjono 1990, p193. Said Naum mosque was designed in the Hindu-Javanese architectural tradition, well-adapted to the Muslim form of worship. The mosque has a square plan with verandas on all four sides. To acquire more free space for worship and better view of the mihrab, columns were eliminated. The roof is designed for heavy rain, while the deep verandas protect the interior from rain and glare. Traditional Javanese idioms have been reinterpreted in order to create a modern regional architecture compatible with the best indigenous work. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, 1986 (Source: AKTC).



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Islamisation	Source	Mosque
Stage 1 15c-1615 (transitory)	Local Malay	
Stage II 1615-1945 (Dutch colonisation)	Mecca Medina	
Stage III 1945-present (contemporary)	World	
Decoration	Example of tumpal	
Pre-Islamic Chinese	 Prehistoric Hindu-Buddhist Islamic	
European Orthodox Islamic		
Pan-Islamic		

Figure 6: Division of the three Islamic periods

A triangular tumpal seems to represent the holy worship of Cosmos Mountain, Meru, where gods reside.

The first syncretism (stage I: transitory): Geographical isolation from the Arab world allowed Malay local culture to be the only source for mosque architecture and ornamentation. Syncretism occurred between Sufism and Javanese faiths, thus walis (saints) said that the direction of the qibla was the 'west'.⁴⁰ Strong continuity of pre-Islamic

⁴⁰ During the prehistoric period, both animism and dynamism were prevailed. Animism is based on a mystic belief in a cult of worshipping ancestors, while dynamism stands for mystic beliefs in certain objects, such as sun, rock, river, etc.

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tradition was shown, but Javanese Muslims designated new functions and meanings to their mosques. Syncretic Islamic motifs were created by the local genius, as a result of modifying local motifs within an Islamic context, learned from missionaries who brought orthodox Islamic ornaments to Java. New regional ornaments, termed 'local Islamic or Malay Islamic', differ from orthodox ones. Chinese motifs contributed partially to this process.

The second syncretism (stage II: Dutch colonisation): Sources for inspiration during this phase became Mecca and Medina, because ulamas (religious leaders) were able to visit Mecca and bring orthodox Islamic architecture and ornaments back home, which were later adjusted to the local ones. Ulamas said that qibla directs 'around the west'. However, the lack of skills also played a role in the postponement of replication until the Dutch colonisers' engagement in teaching techniques. In architecture, the second syncretism occurred in combination of dome and local serambi (veranda). During this time, European motifs, such as palmette, were introduced. Constant but a lesser use of pre-Islamic ornaments as an outcome of the new contacts between Java and the Arab world prompted calligraphy to become popular.

The third syncretism (stage III: contemporary): A standard design and symbols of mosques, inspired by Demak (1479), was set up in Java. Every Muslim could travel and get sources from the whole world. Pan-Islamic ornaments were blended with local tradition, bringing the third syncretism of plurality. Muslims could interpret Islamic architecture and ornament to their own tastes, since the modern science and technology and Islamic environment in daily life are closely related. At this period, ulamas established the true location of the qibla as being the 'northwest'. Orthodox Islamic motifs of arabesque, geometry, and calligraphy gradually replaced pre-Islamic ornaments. Flat roofs, the absence of mihrabs or columns, geometry and arabesque became a trend. In the midst of this, a new consciousness to formulate a style which reflects regional flavour and diversity became stronger towards globalization, either traditional or pan-Islamic or combined, in order to keep Javanese cultural heritage.

Historically, Islamic art had lost its continuity in certain things. Some cultural centres deviated from the original art forms, due to small kingdoms, different interpretations of art, and diverse tastes of

As Sufi Islam has mystic beliefs, the term 'animism' is particularly used for representing prehistoric belief in this research (Tjandrasmita, interview, 2005). From Indonesia, the Arab world where Islam was originated directs toward the west.



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local artists, compared to centralisation and professionals in palaces during the Hindu-Buddhist period.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Islamic ornaments have always been in Java. Calligraphy was mostly visible, while others appeared sporadically. Plurality of Islamic Javanese ornaments with this background is a key to understanding regionalism in Java.

Conclusion

A Javanese term, 'Bhinneka Tunggal Ika' (unity in diversity), was created by the Javanese people to emphasize their own identity and culture. Java has been a centre where mystical animism, Hindu-Buddhism, and Islam co-existed together, moving toward a syncretic religion. In an interview, Tjandrasmita (2005), a distinguished Indonesian scholar and specialist in syncretic Islamic archaeology, argued that Javanese Islam has a few distinct characteristics. Javanese Muslims are greatly concerned with continuity of their cultural heritage, which was created by the local genius (Wale's theory)⁴² across centuries, beyond religions and faiths. Furthermore, Javanese Muslims emphasize the importance of holy ornaments that were derived from Hindu-Buddhism, and try to link them with Islam.

Javanese Muslims are very familiar with their cultural heritage. Through existing media, Islam was effectively penetrated into their hearts, because of the love for heritage and the similarity to Islamic concept.⁴³

Java is a peaceful melting pot; Javanese Islam is syncretic; Javanese descendants adore their cultural heritage; and Javanese Muslims are tolerant, inventing a beautiful amalgamation from many sources, beyond faiths and religions, in order to pay tribute to Allah. Orthodox Islam needs to encourage this, in order to coexist in the tropical and multi cultural Java.

We hope to learn tolerance and flexibility from Javanese Muslim's syncretic approach to their existing and incoming cultures, thus more communication can take place between faiths and religions in current conflicted and violent places across the globe.

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⁴¹ Ambary 1998

⁴² Wales 1948, pp.2-32.

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