Syncretism and the Negotiation of Cultural Memory: The Ritual Washing of Sacred Heirlooms in South Tangerang, Indonesia

Fariz Al Hazmi[a,*], Citra Aryandari[b], and Yves P Cuenza[c]
[a]Indraprasta PGRI University, Indonesia.
[b]Indonesia Institute of the Arts Yogyakarta, Indonesia.
[c]University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines.
*Corresponding Author: farizalhazmi16@gmail.com
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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of syncretic negotiation of the heirloom-washing ritual practiced at Cilenggang, South Tangerang City, Indonesia. The ritual, maintained by the Cilenggang community since the 17th century, is associated with the legacy of Tubagus Muhamad Atif, an early disseminator of Islam in the region. Employing an ethnographic approach grounded in syncretism theory, this research explores how Islamic teachings and local cultural traditions are harmonized through ritual practice. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and literature review. The findings demonstrate that while traditional ritual media and equipment continue to reflect pre-Islamic cultural heritage, shifts in belief systems and ritual meanings indicate an ongoing negotiation shaped by Islamic influence. The incorporation of Islamic cultural expressions, such as hadroh music, da'wah activities, and Islamic dress codes, illustrates the adaptive and dialogic nature of the tradition. These findings highlight that syncretism is not a static condition but a continuous process of renegotiation shaped by social, religious, and cultural influences. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of syncretism as a mechanism through which local traditions are preserved, reinterpreted, and sustained within changing religious landscapes, offering broader insights into cultural resilience and community identity formation.

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Keywords: Syncretism, Ritual Traditions, Heirloom Washing, Local Culture, Islam.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bentuk-bentuk negosiasi sinkretisme dalam tradisi ritual cuci pusaka di Keramat Tajug, Cilenggang, Kota Tangerang Selatan, Provinsi Banten. Tradisi yang telah berlangsung sejak abad ke-17 ini merupakan warisan Tubagus Muhamad Atif, salah satu tokoh penyebar Islam di wilayah Cilenggang. Menggunakan pendekatan etnografis dan berlandaskan teori sinkretisme, penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan proses harmonisasi antara ajaran Islam dan budaya lokal yang tercermin dalam praktik ritual tersebut. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan studi literatur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa negosiasi sinkretisme tampak melalui perpaduan unsur-unsur Islam dengan budaya lokal sebagai upaya mempertahankan keberlanjutan tradisi. Masuknya Islam ke Indonesia membawa pengaruh signifikan terhadap makna, nilai, dan keyakinan yang melandasi ritual cuci pusaka, meskipun media dan perlengkapan tradisi tetap mempertahankan bentuk-bentuk budaya lokal yang telah diwariskan secara turun-temurun. Bentuk negosiasi lainnya terlihat dari pelaksanaan ritual yang kini dilakukan bersamaan dengan tiga perayaan, yaitu cuci pusaka, Maulid Nabi, dan haul. Selain itu, tradisi ini juga mengadopsi unsur budaya Islam lainnya, seperti musik hadroh, kegiatan dakwah, dan penerapan aturan berpakaian Islami. Berbagai pengaruh tersebut menunjukkan bahwa sinkretisme merupakan proses dinamis yang terus mengalami renegosiasi seiring perubahan sosial dan religius dalam masyarakat. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam memperluas pemahaman mengenai sinkretisme sebagai mekanisme negosiasi budaya lokal serta dampaknya terhadap pembentukan identitas dan praktik keagamaan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: *Sinkretisme, Tradisi Ritual, Pencucian Benda Pusaka, Budaya Lokal, Agama Islam*

Introduction

The arrival of Islam on the island of Java was largely accepted without eliminating pre-existing cultural practices, but rather resulted in a process of acculturation between the two (Meyer, 2025: Alatas, 2024: Wahid et al., 2018). A similar dynamic is seen in the tradition of washing heirlooms at the Tajug Shrine in South

Tangerang City. This ritual, practiced since the 17th century, is associated with the legacy of Tubagus Muhammad Atif, an early propagator of Islam in the Cilenggang area (Fadilah, 2022). Today, the community continues to perform this ritual annually as part of the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (Muludan) and the commemoration of Tubagus Muhammad Atif's death (Haul). The ritual of washing heirlooms involves the participation of members of the Islamic boarding school community and serves as a spiritual activity (Arifin, 2013). Although initially intended as a routine act of making sacred objects, this ritual has evolved through community initiatives (Al Hazmi, 2023). Performed for a full day in the month of Rabi' al Awwal, this ritual combines Islamic elements presented by the Muludan celebration, with local cultural practices embodied in the haul. As a result, this tradition cannot be separated from the influence of Islam as a shaping force in the development of local culture.

Islam is a belief system that supports fundamental elements in the formation of culture in Indonesia. Its presence has significantly shaped various cultural expressions, including Islamic influences, which have entered the archipelago and interacted with existing local traditions (Abdullah et al., 2025; Agung et al., 2024). Historically, Islam in Java has been dominant in political and social life while simultaneously maintaining and transforming elements of indigenous Javanese culture, giving rise to a distinctive form of Javanese Islam through syncretism (Alatas, 2024; Yu, 2022). Religious activities are modified and integrated with local customs to encourage public acceptance and facilitate the spread of Islam (Kau & Yahiji, 2018). The tradition of washing heirlooms predates

Islam and is rooted in animist and dynamist beliefs centered on ancestral spirits and sacred objects (Hidayat, 2024; Al Hazmi, 2023). For some communities, maintaining this tradition is related to respect for ancestral heritage, which carries emotional and symbolic meaning (Anderson, 2020). The arrival of Islam did not erase previous practices; instead, it introduced new layers of meaning through syncretic adaptations (Hudzaifah et al., 2025; Makin, 2016).

Syncretism refers to the blending of various elements to create balance and coherence in cultural and religious life (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Nel & Kgatle, 2024). In Indonesia, syncretism has served as a strategy to integrate religious teachings with local traditions to achieve wider societal acceptance. Elements of beliefs embedded in a tradition can merge and reshape its form and meaning (Ringgren, 1969). This process reflects cultural creativity and the productive use of diversity, resulting in new hybrid traditions (Bezklubaya, 2021). Syncretism also embodies ambivalence, bridging seemingly contradictory cultural and religious systems (Bhabha, 2012). Thus, harmony emerges between local traditions and Islam, each influencing the other in a continuous process of negotiation and adaptation (Ringgren, 1969).

Although various previous studies have explained that syncretism occurs in cultural preservation, the case study of the heirloom washing tradition at the Tajug Shrine in South Tangerang City has not received attention in the study of syncretism. In fact, the preservation process that occurs in this tradition has symptoms influenced by syncretism. Because its continuity to this day is still strongly influenced by the local and Islamic cultural elements that surround it. This raises the question "how is the process of

negotiation and the form of syncretism that occurs in the heirloom washing tradition at the Tajug Shrine in South Tangerang City?" Through this question, this study aims to explain the intersection of these various elements resulting in a unique traditional pattern through a continuous process of negotiation embedded in syncretism. This analysis explores the various cultural and religious components present in the ritual, which are interpreted through the perspectives and understandings of the participating community members. Local culture, ultimately, is an idea that is formed, practiced, and maintained collectively by society in everyday life (Sakti et al, 2024; Suradi et al., 2020), which is partly shaped by the beliefs held by its members at certain historical moments (Eko & Putranto, 2019).

This study argues that the ritual of washing heirlooms at the Tajug Shrine in South Tangerang City is not merely a form of historical heritage preservation, but rather a manifestation of a tradition born through a dynamic process of syncretic negotiation. This practice proves that the presence of Islam does not erase the roots of local traditions but rather serves as a formative force that provides new layers of meaning through syncretic strategies. By uniting elements of Islam and local culture, the community successfully creates a balance between religious identity and respect for ancestors. Ultimately, this produces harmony and coherence in their social life. Therefore, the traditional phenomenon at the Tajug Shrine emphasizes that syncretism is a form of cultural creativity that allows visible values to integrate with each other and persist to the present day.

Literature Review

Tradition and Syncretism in Indonesia

Sacred traditions, as products of past cultures, undergo continual transformation as part of an ongoing process of negotiation. Tradition refers to long-standing practices that have become integral to the life of a particular cultural or religious community (Sudirana, 2019). In cultural orientation, the past provides a paradigm through which the present organizes its lived reality, and this paradigm is embodied in tradition (Rüsen, 2012). Consequently, traditions remain inseparable from their historical roots, even as they are reshaped through contemporary changes.

Budiman (2025) argues that negotiation within cultural traditions serves as a mechanism for safeguarding their core elements. This perspective is supported by various studies on cultural negotiation. Makin (2016), for example, demonstrates that syncretic negotiation has been present in classical Javanese texts since the Singasari and Majapahit periods. The arrival of Hinduism, followed by Islam, introduced new layers of syncretism through the adaptation of Hindu narratives into Islamic story forms. Similarly, Sodikin (2013) identifies syncretic elements in the Serat Wirid Hidayat Jati, which continued to evolve and influence Islamic teachings in the 19th century. These syncretic processes also extended to local ritual practices, including offerings.

Cultural negotiation through the modification and preservation of key traditional elements produces distinctive forms of Indonesian culture. This aligns with Norris's (1994) assertion that negotiation has the potential to generate unique cultural expressions. Within

Islamic contexts, negotiation is often employed to harmonize religious teachings with local traditions without violating Islamic law. The Luwu community, for instance, maintains the Maccera Tassi tradition through syncretic adaptation to ensure its compatibility with Islamic principles (Azka et al., 2024). Similar processes occur in Majalengka, where the Gaok tradition blends Islamic beliefs with long-standing local customs (Nur & Saraswati, 2023), and in Selo, where negotiation supports the preservation of the Saparan ritual (Zulkarnain et al., 2025). Thus, syncretism within cultural negotiation fosters forms of acculturation that allow mutually supportive belief systems to coexist (Koentjaraningrat, 2015). As Basyir (2019) notes, such acculturation represents a meaningful expression of religious life.

Collectively, these studies show that successful negotiation in syncretism produces distinctive traditions that maintain harmony between local cultural elements and religious teachings. Traditions persist and adapt even as they incorporate new cultural influences. Consistent with Graburn's (1984) view, negotiation reflects a dynamic process of change shaped by complex interactions and diverse possibilities. However, it is also essential to recognize the potential positive and negative outcomes that may arise during negotiation (Moreno & Littrell, 2001). Therefore, this study not only examines the negotiation processes involved in sustaining the heirloom-washing ritual but also analyzes the impacts of these processes, including the emergence of renegotiation. Negotiation, after all, functions as a means of achieving mutually beneficial resolutions (Huda, 2017).

Syncretism as an Approach

Rituals that embody syncretism reflect a combination of faith and a commitment to practicing Islamic teachings in ways that do not contradict religious principles (Asrawijaya, 2022). Communities may engage in syncretic processes to integrate Islam into their cultural systems through fusion, convergence, and adaptation within existing traditions. In many cases, syncretism has proven effective in sustaining long-standing cultural practices, demonstrating one of its positive contributions to cultural continuity.

However, syncretism is not without challenges. Ringgren (1969) notes that syncretic processes may generate cultural tensions, including shifts in meaning, loss of ritual purity, theological conflict, identity ambiguity, and weakened religious authority. Thus, syncretism can produce both constructive and problematic outcomes. Although syncretism often aims to preserve local culture through Islamic expression, its implementation must be carefully managed by tradition holders, who negotiate these practices based on community interactions and belief systems. This is because religious elements within culture emerge from the dynamic interplay between individuals and their beliefs, shaped by the lived context of practitioners (Mahfuz, 2019).

In Indonesia, traditions and religion frequently coexist through syncretic adaptation. Practices not originally rooted in Islamic teachings are often reinterpreted through Islamic frameworks, resulting in distinctive cultural expressions. The sacred ritual tradition at Keramat Tajug exemplifies this process, making it important to examine how syncretism influences both the tradition

and the surrounding community. The adaptation between local culture and Islam is complex, as not all cultural elements align easily with Islamic norms. In some cases, the blending of local customs and religion is perceived as disruptive or even harmful to religious purity (Rudolph, 2016). Therefore, syncretism must be approached with attention to its potential to foster harmony and meaning. Meaning within a tradition serves as a connective force among various cultural elements (Nugent & Flynn, 2020), and studying syncretism helps illuminate the social and historical structures that shape cultural life.

This study adopts Bezklubaya's (2021) theory of syncretism, which views religion as a source of cultural creativity and a means of utilizing diversity to form new traditions. Syncretism involves the combination of multiple elements to create balance within cultural and religious life (Rosliani, 2012). Through this process, cultural elements embedded in religion form a framework that shapes evolving traditions. Geertz (1976) similarly explains that Javanese Islamic syncretism is rooted in animism, Hindu traditions, and ancient Javanese customs. Bezklubaya (2021) categorizes syncretism into three types: (1) primary syncretism, referring to the early fusion of worldviews in proto-religious and mythological cultures; (2) secondary syncretism, the synthesis of two or more religious traditions at different stages of development through ethnocultural interaction; and (3) tertiary syncretism, a universal form shaped by globalism that connects diverse fields of knowledge and culture.

By employing this framework, the present study seeks to deepen understanding of syncretism as a mechanism of local cultural negotiation and to examine its broader influence on society.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach to trace syncretic practices between culture and religion within the heirloom-washing tradition at Keramat Tajug. Qualitative research, grounded in post-positivist philosophy, is conducted in natural settings to understand phenomena holistically (Creswell, 2014). Ethnography, in particular, focuses on exploring cultural values and meanings within the broader context of a community's way of life, including issues of culture, lifeworld, and identity (Barker, 2003). Through this approach, researchers immerse themselves in the social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions of community members (Reeves et al., 2008).

Data collection and analysis followed the ethnographic stages proposed by Kirk and Miller (2012): (1) finding the field, (2) investigation (discovery and gaining information), (3) data interpretation (reading, interpreting, and refining), and (4) leaving the field (explaining, exiting, and organizing). The first stage involved selecting the community as the research site. The study focused on the heirloom-washing tradition in Keramat Tajug, Cilenggang, South Tangerang City, Banten Province.

The investigation stage was conducted through observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations were carried out throughout the entire ritual process from preparation to completion to capture activities, interactions, and symbolic practices.

Semi-structured interviews enabled dialogic engagement, allowing researchers to explore informants' perspectives in depth while maintaining flexibility to pursue emerging themes (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

The data interpretation stage involved reading field notes, interpreting meanings, and refining emerging findings. Analysis drew on Bezklubaya's syncretism framework to identify traditional elements and classify them according to syncretic forms. These elements were examined through community understandings passed down across generations and supported by literature review. The final stage involved presenting findings and discussing their implications for tradition practitioners. This stage also served as an expression of respect for the community, ensuring the maintenance of positive relationships between researchers and participants.

Result and Discussion

Elements of Heirloom-Washing Traditions in Keramat Tajug

In the South Tangerang City area, the spread of Islam was carried out by Tubagus Muhammad Atif, son of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa (Sultan of Banten in the period 1640 – 1650 AD). According to Tubagus Sos Rendra, Historian and Chairman of the Tubagus Muhammad Atif Association, the history of Tubagus Muhammad Atif's arrival was when he was sent to spread Islam in 1667 while also defending the South Tangerang City area from conflict with the Dutch government. Before the arrival of Islam, the Cilenggang community was still Hindu. Thus, Tubagus Muhammad Atif became a figure who paved the way for the entry of Islam into the Cilenggang area, South Tangerang City and taught forms of Islamic

tradition. One of the traditions and customs of the Cilenggang community in the period before the arrival of Islam was the washing of heirlooms. Then, this tradition was still carried out but with Islamic elements in it. Elements of Islam and local culture are found in several elements of tradition such as the form of activities, the time of implementation, the accessories used and performances.

Table 1.
Elements in the tradition of washing heirlooms

Elements of tradition	**Function and origin of Tradition**	**Informant**
Heirloom-washing ritual	Washing heirlooms as maintenance; Local culture and Hinduism	TB Sos Rendra/52
Sacred Tombs	Place of implementation as sacred grave of Tubagus Muhamad Atif; Local culture	TB Sos Rendra/52 TM/49
Haul Celebration	Commemorating the death anniversary of Tubagus Muhamad Atif; Local culture	TB Sos Rendra/52
Offerings	Ritual complement as a symbol of gratitude consumed after the event; Local culture and Hinduism	TB Sos Rendra/52 TM/49
Seven kinds of flowers, lime and musk oil	Mixture of ingredients for washing heirlooms; Local culture and Hinduism	TB Sos Rendra/52
Maulid Celebration	Commemorating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad; Islam	EK/56 SI/63
Reading of Verses from the Qur'an	Symbolism of Islam; Islam	TB Sos Rendra/52
Hadroh Music Performance	Islamic spiritual music entertainment; Islam	EK/56
Islamic Preaching	Preaching with Islamic themes and their relationship to tradition; Islam	EK/56 SI/63

Elements of tradition	Function and origin of Tradition	Informant
Reading of Prayers to Allah	Praying together as a request to Allah; Islam	TB Sos Rendra/52
Muslim Clothing	To wear closed clothing according to Islamic law; Islam	EK/56

Based on the table above, it could be identified five elements of local/Hindu culture and six elements of Islamic culture. All of these elements are used in the implementation of this tradition. The various complementary elements make it a tradition that is part of a ritual. In this tradition of washing heirlooms, respect and prayer are shown to Allah, the God of Muslims, through a series of local cultural ritual practices.



Figure 1. The procession of the heirloom washing tradition in Keramat Tajug (Source: Author documentation, 2021)

The practice of heirloom-washing tradition has been practiced by Indonesian communities since before the arrival of Islam. According to Rendra, a historian from South Tangerang City (2022), before the arrival of Islam in Cilenggang, people typically performed the heirloom-washing ritualon the 1st of Suro (Javanese calendar), as it

was considered a holy day. Although some Javanese still practice this ritual today, the Muslim community in South Tangerang City strives to maintain heirloom-washing traditionby integrating it with Islamic elements.

When Islam arrived through Tubagsu Muhamad Atif, heirloom-washing traditionwas moved to the 14th day of Rabbi al-Awwal, to commemorate the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. The people of Cilenggang refer to the event as muludan, which commemorates the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. The celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday first took place during the Fatimid Dynasty, specifically during the reign of King al-Muiz li Dinillah (241-365), and spread from the 4th to the 16th century CE (Masruri, 2018). Then, in the 16th century, the Banten region already held Muludan celebrations, including in the city of South Tangerang.

The washing of heirlooms is a crucial part of the ceremony, employing a specific process, including the use of seven springs, lime juice, coconut water, seven types of flowers, and the recitation of prayers. This process has been passed down through generations as part of the local culture. Twenty-seven heirlooms, inherited from Tubagus Muhammad Atif, serve as the medium for heirloom-washing traditionin Keramat Tajug. Of these, two have distinct appearances: a palm leaf sheath containing verses from the Quran and Tubagus Muhammad Atif's navel covering. Other heirlooms include weapons such as keris (a dagger), spears, and machetes dating from the Dutch colonial period.



Figure 2. Process of washing heirlooms
(Source: Author documention, 2021)

The Muludan celebration features Islamic art, including the recitation of prayers accompanied by music. The Muludan ceremony is typically accompanied by a mix of traditional music (Kau & Yahiji, 2018). The Muludan ceremony, which features heirloom-washing traditionin Keramat Tajug, includes Hadrah music. In practice, hadrah music is performed during the heirloom-washing ritual along with the recitation of *shalawat*. *Hadrah* music serves as a medium for worshiping Allah and homage to Prophet Muhammad, a part of Islamic tradition. The accompaniment of the *rebana* (a percussion instrument) and the recitation of poetry or prayers is a hallmark of *hadrah* music (Bakhtiar Ramadhan, 2018).



Figure 3. Hadrah Music Performance
(Source: Author documentation, 2021)

Following the death of Tubagus Muhammad Atif, the heirloom-washing traditionbecame a medium to commemorate his death. The Cilenggang community carries out this tradition and commemorates the death, known as haul. Haul is a tradition of remembrance for important figures who have passed away in Indonesian society. The word "haul" comes from the Arabic word "hawl," meaning "year." In this sense, haul is a tradition commemorating the anniversary of death, often observed by Muslims in Indonesia (Hanif, 2016). Haul as a tradition not only serves to commemorate someone's death but also serves as a prayer for the soul to be granted peace and for all good deeds to be accepted. The haul activity is intended to pray for goodness and commemorate the struggles of those being commemorated (Amin, 2020).

Another element that complements the heirloom-washing ritual is *slametan* (offerings). These offerings are neatly arranged in the center of the ceremony, consisting of tumpeng rice complete with side dishes, vegetables, fruit and other accompaniments. These

offerings and *slametan* represent elements of syncretism because they combine local cultural beliefs with Islamic beliefs. The ritual tradition of giving offerings, incense, and equipment is one form of syncretism (Maimun et al., 2020). Many Muslim communities perform rituals accompanied by offerings and prayers for various purposes (Humaeni et al., 2021). Offerings and *slametan* are Indonesian traditions that have been practiced since ancient times as a form of offering to certain gods or spirits (Humaeni et al., 2021). Offerings are part of rituals performed since the Paleolithic era by ancient peoples in the archipelago (Sunyoto, 2013). However, in the Pusaka Washing tradition, offerings are not presented to creatures other than humans, but are instead served after the celebration.

Based on the elements contained in heirloom-washing tradition in South Tangerang, it shows that this tradition is a cultural practice that combines local culture with Islamic beliefs. In line with Mori's opinion (2015), the ritual presents verbal forms such as music, very formal speeches and prayers that are understood as metalanguage aimed at non-human agents such as divinity, ancestors or other respect. The arrival of Islam provides complexity to cultural traditions through the fusion of other elements (Makin, 2016). Elements in the tradition complement each other and influence the implementation process (Ringgren, 1969). This includes heirloom-washing traditionin Keramat Tajug South Tangerang City.

Negotiating Tradition and Syncretism

The arrival of Islam in Cilenggang did not eliminate the tradition of washing heirlooms, as the administrators considered it a good practice, considering the situation during the spread of Islam by

Tubagus Muhammad Atif, when there was war with colonial invaders. At that time, washing heirlooms was considered a positive practice, as it cleansed and sharpened them for war. However, to eliminate mystical beliefs, the community began adopting Islamic values by reciting prayers to Allah. Through this process, the community strives to balance traditions so that they can be carried out from generation to generation and preserved for the future.

The complementary elements in the Keramat Tajug's heirloom-washing ritualform a syncretism as part of the negotiation. Based on the observations, there are three forms of syncretism in traditional celebrations. First, primary syncretism occurs when the process of washing heirlooms is carried out with offerings and accessories, but the recitation of prayers is directed to God. According to Tubagus Sos Rendra (2022), previously the washing was carried out by reciting mantras and worshiping heirlooms, but this changed when the community embraced Islam. Heirlooms are no longer worshipped by the community and only serve as symbols of cleansing, but the process still uses prayers to God. This is in line with the opinion of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism that the growing understanding of Islamic teachings has made people aware that Muslims should not trust heirlooms Tradition (Kemenbudpar, 2011).

The second form of syncretism occurs in the implementation process by combining three celebrations with different cultures: the heirloom washing, the Muludan celebration, and the Haul. According to the event organizers, the combination was carried out simultaneously to provide time effectiveness so that the celebration was not held twice, so that all preparations and needs could be done

at one time. This is a policy implemented in the community tradition so that the celebration can still be carried out in a single activity. In line with Gray's opinion (2010) that effective cultural policies originate from the ideology of the community. Although the celebrations are different, they can fill and complement the implementation process into an interesting ritual tradition. Because the process is not to deny identity, but to provide an alternative position of identity through the performances represented (Carlson, 2013).

The third form of syncretism involves the introduction of new elements, such as *hadrah* music performances, Islamic preaching, and the use of Muslim attire. Despite the music's Islamic spiritual nature, *hadrah* music performances serve as a universally enjoyed form of entertainment. Music is considered a part of entertainment that can continue to evolve through the songs and instruments used. This aligns with the opinion of Nursyahida & Wardana (2020), who stated that hadrah music is used as a medium for Islamic preaching and has now become an art form in religious activities. Islam has had a significant influence on the performing arts, although there is no specific Islamic performing art (Heriyawati, 2016). Furthermore, interludes of Islamic preaching activities within traditions serve to provide learning to the community participating in the tradition. The delivery of Islamic preaching is usually adapted to the conditions and challenges faced by the tradition at the time it is delivered. Furthermore, the community's attire has changed with evolving trends but remains in line with Islamic religious rules.

Through various negotiation processes involving forms of syncretism carried out by administrators, the tradition has

maintained its elements to this day. As in many other communities in Indonesia, syncretism has been used to preserve traditions by incorporating elements of Islam. This aligns with Geertz's (1976) argument that this fusion process has become a form of syncretism common to Islam in Indonesia, such as in Java.

The administrators of the Keramat Tajug's heirloom-washing ritual believe that traditions must continue to evolve with changing times, even though their implementation requires a process of negotiation. This is because traditions have been considered a symbol of the identity of the Cilenggang community. This aligns with Budiman's (2025) opinion that negotiation processes within a cultural tradition can be used as a means of protecting traditions. Yin (2018) also argues that cultural traditions are not defined as fixed, ancient, or pure, as they can change over time.

Various Perceptions on the Syncretism Negotiation

In the heirloom-washing at Keramat Tajug, several problems arose when negotiating through syncretism. The process of syncretism influenced the continuity and gave rise to various perceptions within the community. The most positive impact currently felt is that the tradition still survives and continues to be carried out by the community. Through traditions that are still carried out, community groups can utilize traditions for various purposes, such as interacting with each other and strengthening the group. This is in line with the opinion of Lubanska, (2016) that syncretism is carried out as a strategy for the survival of a group. Furthermore, syncretism also influences the form, function, and meaning of the tradition. As previously discussed, before the arrival of Islam, the practice of

washing heirlooms was still oriented towards beliefs in ancestor worship (animism) and the power of heirlooms (dynamism).

In addition to the positive impacts that emerge as a preservation of tradition, in this tradition, syncretism has a negative impact that appears from the perspective of society. Based on the results of the interview, it was found that some community groups consider heirloom-washing tradition as an action that is contrary to Islamic teachings. This negative perception has existed since the implementation of syncretism was carried out and resulted in conflict and degradation of understanding of traditional practices. According to the tradition manager, in terms of Islamic religious beliefs, syncretism leads to conflicts in beliefs. Some people believe that in Islam anything that is not in its teachings and not taught by the Prophet Muhammad is considered "heretical" behavior. In line with the opinion of Coleman et al. (1997) that syncretism is seen as controversial, often interpreted as "inauthenticity" or "contamination" that infiltrates foreign traditions and is considered inappropriate.

Some communities reject traditional elements, such as offerings. They believe this is prohibited in Islam, especially during the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday. Offerings are considered a non-Islamic tradition that should not be used because they are believed to feed spirits and ancestral spirits. This aligns with Sodikin 's (2013) statement that some Javanese people generally believe that offerings are intended for spirits that roam their homes.

However, in the understanding of the family that holds the tradition, all elements, such as offerings, are merely media and symbols; the

prayers contained within them are directed to God. Therefore, negative misperceptions from the community are seen as misinformation about the purpose and meaning of offerings that are not conveyed to them. To mitigate this perception, the food used for offerings is consumed together after the event. This ensures that the offerings are a symbol of thanksgiving that is shared, unlike offerings intended for the worship of spirits, which are not consumed after the event.

Another source of misconception stems from some people who believe that the water used to wash heirlooms acts as a talisman that provides benefits to the community, such as bringing blessings, healing, and so on. They will take this water home and use it as a talisman or medicine. This has led some people to consider this tradition deviant because it contains a source of idolatry. However, according to the tradition's administrators, this belief stems from the individuals themselves, not from the tradition's owners. Therefore, this problem is addressed by disposing of the water used to wash heirlooms in the presence of the community present at the tradition.

In this heirloom washing tradition, one element has been removed and strictly prohibited due to strong community opposition: the burning of incense. Efforts to prohibit the burning of incense in the Tajug sacred area or when washing heirlooms stem from the negative perceptions it creates in Indonesian society. To this day, Indonesians still believe that burning incense is a form of summoning spirits. In ritual traditions, some interpret the burning of incense as a medium for summoning spirits or a link between the human world and the spirit world (Turangan et al., 2014). Therefore, the prohibition on burning incense is an effort to avoid

misunderstandings among the community. Alternatively, administrators use fragrances such as musk oil to replace incense and incense. Three forms of negotiation to prevent conflict in syncretism include making food offerings as food for the community in attendance, disposing of the water used to wash heirlooms in the presence of the community, and eliminating and prohibiting the burning of incense or incense, replacing it with musk oil.

Another effort undertaken by tradition managers to prevent negative perceptions is by providing information and clarifying opinions through lectures. This method is used to support efforts beyond negotiation. According to the managers, negative perceptions also arise from a lack of public understanding of the meaning and purpose of tradition, which leads to disinformation. This is in line with Aminullah's (2017) opinion that the public's low understanding of ritual traditions is caused by a lack of explanation and understanding of the traditions during the process of transferring knowledge to the wider community, resulting in inadequate communication.

The perception of Islamic communities regarding traditional ritual activities can indeed occur, as in heirloom-washing traditionin Keramat Tajug. Many Muslims believe that media-oriented thinking as a ritual process is an act of polytheism because it can change the goal to something other than God (Woodward, 1989). Therefore, the process of negotiating forms of syncretism becomes an effort to avoid conflict in this perception. This is especially true for the people of Banten, the majority of whom are Muslim, who view ritual activities as deviant behavior. Problems with religious traditions originate from within the community itself, especially from hardline

groups who justify defending religious values against what is considered a violation (Lindsay, 2008).

The problem intensified in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as the majority of Banten's population was fanatical about Islam (Kartodirdjo, 1966). This resulted in increasingly threatened syncretism and gave rise to perceptions between two opposing groups. Tradition holders and their supporters believed the traditions they practiced were good and did not conflict with religious rules. Conversely, those opposing them felt the traditions were deviant because they contained elements that could not be incorporated into Islamic teachings.

According to Ashadi (2019), movements perceived as oriented toward progress by negotiating tradition are called reformist, while on the other hand, these movements are considered oppositional, negating the fundamental integration of local culture and modern ideas into Islam. Supporters of tradition engage in negotiations in the hope that customary traditions play a role in the development of Islam in South Tangerang City and therefore deserve to be preserved. However, customary leaders do not impose their beliefs on the community and grant the community the right to participate or not. The most important thing for tradition is the absence of protest or violence from either side.

Traditions that are open to the general public present a free form of cultural expression. This concept does not require the reconstruction of transcendental and rational universal justifications (Barker, 2003). Tradition must be understood normatively and pragmatically, not epistemologically, as it can be guaranteed through values related

to cultural human rights and cultural pluralism. The community supports it because they believe it is something good, not truth or destiny.

Equality and diversity imply the need for cultural pluralism and the representation of diverse public opinions, cultural practices, and diverse social and geographic conditions. Freedom and solidarity imply genuine, unforced forms of sharing and cooperation, which are more meaningful as support for freedom and togetherness than as control (Barker, 2003). In this regard, preservation is an important part of maintaining environmental harmony in a harmonious rhythm (Adishakti, 2016). This perception aligns with the opinion of some proponents of tradition that, as long as the tradition is carried out with a positive perspective, it is permissible, provided it benefits the community and does not harm others.

The cultural diversity of a community fosters traditions that coexist and are interconnected, creating a fusion and integration of religious ritual discourse (Salim, 2013). The syncretism process within this tradition, for example, has influenced the very fabric of the tradition and its community. Although its various influences can have negative impacts, such as conflicts in perception, tradition nonetheless fosters cultural diversity. The intersection of culture and religion in community life can lead to conflict, making the process of harmonization key to understanding local traditions within the context of religious differences (Saihu, 2020).

Efforts by traditional practitioners to maintain harmony with their environment have kept these customs aligned with Islamic law, although negative public perceptions persist. Despite the challenges,

the concept of syncretism is part of human nature, striving to foster religious goodness that aligns beliefs. This is because culture, managed within a particular group, fosters various societal roles (Aryandari et al., 2023). The cultural orientation that shapes customs in human life refers to the past which provides a present paradigm for structuring the world of life (Rusen, 2012).

Conclusion

The practices and management of the heirloom-washing tradition in Keramat Tajug, South Tangerang City, demonstrate how local cultural practices are harmonized with Islamic teachings. This harmonization occurs through primary, secondary, and tertiary forms of syncretism. The community, as the custodian of the tradition, upholds an ideology that combines distinct cultural and religious elements to preserve a long-standing heritage. Following the arrival of Islam in Indonesia, the tradition continued with the incorporation of the *haul* (a commemoration of the deceased) specifically honoring Tubagus Muhammad Atif and his family. This commemoration is held alongside the *Muludan* celebration, which marks the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.

Despite its current status as a widely attended annual event, the syncretic nature of the tradition has generated negative perceptions among some groups. Certain individuals view the ritual as incompatible with Islamic teachings, particularly because it involves offerings and ceremonial practices associated with commemorative celebrations. In response, tradition practitioners emphasize that the ritual does not constitute idolatry, as prayers are directed to Allah rather than to the heirlooms. Supporters of the tradition argue that

syncretism has historically facilitated the acceptance of Islam in Indonesia by allowing cultural continuity. Thus, this study highlights the significant influence of syncretism on both tradition and community life.

This research is limited to examining the forms and impacts of syncretism within the heirloom-washing tradition in Keramat Tajug. Future studies may explore symbolic meanings, potential tensions related to religious tolerance, and other dimensions that can deepen understanding of local cultural traditions.

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