



Title: Transformation of Hamzah Fansuri's Wujūdīyah Thought in Malay Islamic Civilization: Continuity and Adaptation in the Contemporary Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indonesia and Malaysia

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Transformation of Hamzah Fansuri's *Wujūdīyah* Thought in Malay Islamic Civilization: Continuity and Adaptation in the Contemporary Socio-cultural Dynamics of Indonesia and Malaysia

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Abstract

The teachings of *Wujūdīyah* developed by Hamzah Fansuri in the sixteenth century represent an important strand of Malay Islamic intellectual history, particularly in understanding the relationship between God, creation, and human spirituality. In Indonesia and Malaysia, this tradition has undergone transformation in response to changing social, political, cultural, and religious contexts, including shifts in religious authority and Islamic discourse. The current study intended to trace the development of *Wujūdīyah*. Furthermore, the study aimed to situate it in the Malay religious culture as well as explore the manifestations of its acceptance and rejection in different geo-historical settings. Qualitative research design included a historical-descriptive and hermeneutic-interpretive approach. Methods used for the research included textual analysis, literature review, and semi-structured interviews. The conclusion confirmed that *Wujūdīyah* is not static but adaptable and regularly reinterpreted in this modern day through the cycles of acceptance, debate, regulation, and revival. These processes are facilitated through networks of practitioners, constellations of concern, and local

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cultural formations. Overall, Indonesia is more accommodative and cultural-communitarian than Malaysia, which is claimed to be regulatory and doctrinal-state oriented. *Wujūdīyah* continues to serve as an important model of self and spiritual identity. This also offers a possible middle ground, which may be conducive to more spiritual discussion and to the salience of humanistic aspirations in modern Islamic societies. The main purpose of the research was to investigate Malay Sufism and, more generally, to offer an early foundation for a model of localized Islamic thinking based on localized circumstances.

Keywords: Hamzah Fansuri, Islam in the Archipelago, Malay Sufism, *transformation of thought*, *Wujūdīyah*

Introduction

Sufism in the development of Islam, in the Malay world, has secured a unique and highly specialized place in shaping its religious, cultural, and civilizational landscape. Some of these have become well-known, such as *Wujūdīyah*, traditionally linked to the 17th-century Acehese Sufi Hamzah Fansuri. The closeness of his idea of the oneness of being appears to have been elaborated upon in Malay settings, which speak of such local transformation.¹

Sufism has been instrumental in the development of Malay Islamic civilization and in the formation of the religious identity of Indonesian and Malaysian societies. It has contributed to the spiritual dimension of society. Additionally, it has also influenced the social, cultural, political, and intellectual development of society. Among the many expressions of Sufism that developed in the region, the *Wujūdīyah* teachings developed by Hamzah Fansuri hold a special place. These teachings offer a metaphysical framework that fits in with and includes Malay cultural expressions.²

The ideas of Fansuri, who interpreted the concept of *wahdat al-wujūd* of Ibn 'Arabi in the light of local language, symbols, and imaginative expressions, formed an important basis for the spirituality and cosmology of Malay society from the 16th century onwards. However, several studies indicate that *Wujūdīyah* was influential not only in the regions religious perspective but also in social practices, artistic traditions, and the patterns of Sufi missionary activity.³

However, the current social and cultural context calls for a re-reading of this intellectual legacy. Modernization, globalization, religious literalism, and Islamic political identity movements are rewiring and recreating the Sufi tradition. However, Sufi heritage, as Al-Attas would have it, contributes much to maritime Southeast Asia's national identity and religious vision.⁴ Therefore, Indonesia and Malaysia are more suitable as comparative studies to study the conceptual development of *Wujūdīyah* thought. The two countries share a Malay-Islamic intellectual heritage that is linked to the networks of Sufi scholarship. Still, they have developed different forms of religious authorities and relations between the state and religion.

Indonesia is likely to be perceived as a more socio-culturally integrated and pluralist Islamic

¹Dedi Kuswandi, Rozib Sulistiyo, and Mohamad Syawaludin, "Malay Sufism in the Archipelag," *Al-Tsaqafa: Scientific Journal of Islamic Civilization* 20, no. 1 (2023): 55–67, <https://doi.org/10.15575/al-tsaqafa.v20i1.23689>.

²Ismail Ismail, "Wujudiyah Hamzah Fansuri's Philosophy of Thought and Influence in the Malay World of the Archipelago," *Manhaj: Journal of Research and Community Service* 1, no. 3 (2016): 239–252, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1161/mhj.v4i3.188>.

³Khairudin Aljunied, "Reorienting Sufism: Hamka and Islamic Mysticism in the Malay World," *Indonesia*, no. 101 (2016): 67, <https://doi.org/10.5728/indonesia.101.0067>.

⁴Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam in Malay History and Culture* (Malaysia: Petaling Jaya, 2012), 56–58.

discourse. In this discourse, Sufi norms continue to thrive through the pesantren systems underpinned by such mass-based Islamic organizations as *Nahdlatul Ulama*. By contrast, Malaysia provides an example of a more formally regulated (though not necessarily less repressive) religious orthodoxy of the institutional faculties of state fatwa councils and national Islamic authorities. These differences have led to diverse interpretations, legitimisations, and practices of the common denominated *Wujūdīyah* thought in contemporary society.

Hamzah Fansuri has been studied from many angles, including the intellectual history, the philology, and the theology of manuscripts. The authors use these studies to emphasize the importance of *Wujūdīyah* teachings in determining the theology of classical Malay Sufism. Moreover, they also highlight some theological controversies that erupted as a result of the strong criticism of Nuruddin al-Raniri (d. 1658) during the 17th century.⁵ Recent philological research on the aestheticism and symbolism of Hamzah Fansuri's Sufi poetry indicates the poetic-metaphysical nature of *Wujūdīyah* teachings.⁶

Contrary to research, the network-base shows that the legacy of *Wujūdīyah* doctrine continued into later periods, with their ideas that are referenced among scholars in Aceh, Pattani, and Malay.⁷ A different study draws a line between local Islamic identity and Malay Sufism. This reveals how these practices act as a cultural basis and social guidance within the shore communities inhabiting the archipelago. A study of the evolution of *Wujūdīyah* thinking in modern social worlds, especially for a comparative study between Indonesia and Malaysia, is under research.⁸ For the most part, the current research is still concentrated on textual analysis, while less effort has gone into consideration of the social, institutional, or civilizational adaptation of its teachings.

However, this discrepancy leads to the question: how does *Wujūdīyah* accommodate the increasingly dynamic conditions of power in contemporary Muslim societies, especially in terms of religious authority, institutional reform, and an increasingly pluralistic social reality? This is relevant to the question of how classical Sufi metaphysics and its ideas are still relevant or alive in Contemporary Islam in Southeast Asia.

The current study aimed to offer a new perspective on the development of Hamzah Fansuri's *Wujūdīyah* thought in the context of Malay Islamic civilization. This study did not treat *Wujūdīyah* as a historical doctrine but it focused on how it is traced, interpreted, and contextualized in the modern socio-cultural dynamics in Indonesia and Malaysia. Moreover, the study discussed traditional metaphysical notions as they function in the constraints of contemporary religious discourse, of cultural context, and of the national religious authority structures.

These scholarly findings are significant for the sustenance of *Wujūdīyah* not only as a historical intellectual tradition but also as a continuing epistemological axis of Malay Islamic civilization. Caught as we may be today between resurgent scripturalism, puritanism, and the homogenization of religious practices. Turning to a *Wujūdīyah* tradition, Sufi thought offers powerful lessons on how

⁵Amy Nadirah Jacob and Ismail Mamat, "Sufism Network in the Malay World: A Historical Overview," *Al-Itqan: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative Studies* 6, no. 2 (2022): 41–59.

⁶Angga Arika, "The Concept of God in Malay Sufi Literature," *El-Hayah* 15, no. 1 (2025): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.22515/elha.v15i1.11075>.

⁷Iskandar Arnel, "The Politics of Piety: Sufism, Power, and Network Formations in Asia-Pacific Islam," *Asia-Pacific Journal on Religion and Society* 8, no. 2 (2025): 85, <https://doi.org/10.24014/apjrs.v8i2.37707>.

⁸Theguh Saumantri, "The Dialectic of Islam Nusantara and Its Contribution To The Development of Religious Moderation In Indonesia," *Focus: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 57–67, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jf.v7i1.4295>.

Islam can speak to us as both spiritually grounded and culturally specific but broadly socially inclusive. Situating *Wujūdīyah* in the context of the realities of modern Indonesia and Malaysia opens broader conversations, not only about this intellectual tradition but also about the fate of Islamic thought traditions more generally in plural, rapidly disintegrating societies.

2. Literature Review

Wujūdīyya Wujūd is a basic notion in *Sufi* philosophy that all being is an emanation of the One Being, which is God. It was expressed by Ibn ‘Arabi, and has been explained in detail in his two great books, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* and the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*. Ibn ‘Arabi held that the only sheer existence is God, and everything else exists as a manifestation of the Divine.⁹ Toshihiko Izutsu holds in *The Concept of Existence in Islamic Philosophy*: *Wahdat al-wujūd* is not strictly a metaphysical doctrine but it also establishes the structure through which one must comprehend the profound relationship between humanity and God.¹⁰

The doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* introduced into the archipelago by Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240) and other Sufis, such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, is fundamental to the Malay Sufi tradition. Hamzah Fansuri’s works, *Asrār al-‘Arifīn* and *Sharāb al-‘Ashiqīn*, combine *wahdat al-wujūd* philosophy with Malay local traditions and give birth to a genre of archipelagic philosophical Sufism.

This metaphysical tradition was introduced to the Malay world through the intellectual works of prominent Sufi scholars, such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani. Hamzah Fansuri integrated the philosophical themes of Ibn ‘Arabi into the vernaculars and cultures of Malay society through works, such as *Asrār al-‘Arifīn* [The Secrets of the Mystics] and *Sharāb al-‘Ashiqīn* [The Drink of Lovers]. Johns and others argued that this was a major mode of intellectual coping, converting ethereal metaphysical ideas into poetic symbols and literary forms that were more accessible to local audiences.¹¹

Recent academic work has started to view the *Wujūdīyah* as more than just a microcosm of Ibn ‘Arabi transmission. Rather than being seen as a static intellectual movement, it is now understood as one where Middle Eastern concepts of metaphysics were culturally and linguistically reformed locally. For instance, Aljunied argues that Hamzah Fansuri’s works should be seen as an independent intellectual tradition within the Malay world, rather than simply as derivative texts.¹² In the same vein, Howell argues that Sufism in South-east Asia emerged through “vernacularisation,” where universal Islamic concepts were reinterpreted within the framework of local epistemological paradigms.¹³

The dialogical turn in recent scholarship on *Wujūdīyah* highlights the need for an integration of intellectual history and socio-cultural analysis in the interaction between *Wujūdīyah* scholarship. The

⁹Hajam, and Theguh Saumantri, “Concept of God, Humanity and Insan Kamil: Hall Al-Rumuz Wa Mafatih Al-Kunuz Manuscript of Ibn ‘Arabi,” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2023): 145–75, <https://doi.org/10.22515/ajpif.v20i1.7612>.

¹⁰Toshihiko. Izutsu, *Concepts of Existence in Islamic Philosophy* (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2022), 112.

¹¹A. H. Johns, “Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History,” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 2 (1961): 10–23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0084255900009943>.

¹²Khairudin Aljunied, “Reorienting Sufism: Hamka and Islamic Mysticism in the Malay World.” 67.

¹³Julia Day Howell, *Revitalised Sufism and the New Piety Movements in Islamic Southeast Asia*, ed. Bryan Turner and Oscar Salemink (Routledge, 2014), 295, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315758534>.

early philological studies were concerned with issues of textual authenticity and manuscript transmission. Whereas, the modern approaches are concerned with exploring in detail how particular metaphysical doctrines are fused with cultural practices, institutional authority, and wider social change in Muslim societies.

The *Wujūdīyah* is comprised of a number of interrelated ideas, which further add to its philosophical centrality. The first principle is *wahdat al-wujūd* (Unity of Existence), meaning all existence is beneath the reality of God. This is a metaphysical principle in symbology that can help to illustrate the intimate interaction of man, nature, and the Divine on the basis of traditional Malay intellectual foundations allegorically.¹⁴

However, the thoughts of *Wujūdīyah* in the Malay world were not free from controversy. One of the most important critiques came from an Islamic scholar from Aceh, Nuruddin al-Raniri, who was strongly against some of the constructions of *wahdat al-wujūd*. He stressed that this *tawhid* should be maintained as a clear distinction between the Creator (*Khāliq*) and creation (*Makhlūq*). In his *Hujjat al-Šiddiq* [The Proof of the Truthful], al-Raniri condemned Hamzah Fansuri's teaching for having too much, especially metaphysical speculation.

This argument was later revisited by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, in response to the criticisms of Hamzah Fansuri and a number of others whom he considers to have followed from Philosophical language Sufism, for many misunderstandings. This clearly indicates that *Wujūdīyah* should not be associated with the simple accusation of pantheism rather, linked, in general, to Islamic metaphysics, as al-Attas says.¹⁵

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative study examined the development of Malay Sufism through textual analysis and historical interpretation. The qualitative methodology is suitable for the needs of the study. This is because it studies classical religious texts that need careful and context-sensitive reading. Such an approach is characteristic of most of the studies of Sufism, of philology, and of civilizational research, as long as the researchers are interested in reconstructing multi-layered meanings, semiotic systems, and social-intellectual contexts around classical texts.¹⁶

The primary data of this research comprised the works in the forms of poems, mystical proses, and other classical Malay manuscripts by Hamzah Fansuri. Documents were taken from both printed versions and critical editions but were also obtained through digital archives at philological institutes. This selection helped in the establishment of the discussions validity and highlighted the concepts of Fansurian thought that are based on the original source text. The secondary data was taken from the writings of other researchers, including books and articles.

To increase understanding of Hamzah Fansuri's works, the hermeneutic analysis was used. Close reading of texts in context can reveal symbolic structures and Sufi metaphors. Furthermore, it may also allow the exploration of the link between language and the attitude to life implicit in Sufi thought.

¹⁴Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 2017), 65.

¹⁵Adam Badhrulhisham, and Mohamad Firdaus Mohd Isa, "The Islamization of the Malaysian State in the Context of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-'Attas' Islamization of Science Ideas: An Overview," *Ulwan Journal* 2, no. 1 (2017): 189–203.

¹⁶Retna Dwi Estuningtiyas, "Contemporary Challenges in Islamic Scholarship in The Light of Intellectual Connections Between Central Asia and Southeast Asia," *The International Journal of Pegon: Islam Nusantara Civilization* 14, no. 01 (2025): 241–60, <https://doi.org/10.51925/inc.v14i01.136>.

Through content analysis and hermeneutics, common thematic patterns, conceptual categories, and structures of thought are revealed.¹⁷ The analytical methodology used herein was to trace the major themes, namely philosophy of *Wujūdīyah*, *martabat tujuh*, and *wahdat al-wujūd*, and to explore how these Malay cultural aspects were embedded in the writings of Fansuri.¹⁸

The research is grounded in the philosophical hermeneutics, particularly drawing on the framework of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Moreover, the concept of Gadamer's "fusion of horizons" is interpreted today through a dialogue between the position of the authors text and its historical background at the time of its creation.¹⁹ Because of the polysemous semantics of many Sufi texts, essential concepts, such as *wujūd*, *tajallī*, and *insān kāmīl* are interpreted within the textual structure itself in classical intellectual legacies of Sufism as well as in socio-historical contexts in the Malay world. This ensures that readers do not read too literally, nor does it facilitate a more precise apprehension of the texts' metaphysical dimensions.

Additionally, the analysis would be triangulated with secondary scholarship on Hamzah Fansuri, Malay Sufism, and more recent studies of Islamic intellectual history in Southeast Asia to enhance interpretive validity. Only those interpretations that can be supported by textual evidence, fit within the overall framework of classical Sufi metaphysics, and contextualized in terms of the historical background of Malay Islamic thought are believed to be valid.

This interpretative approach is based on the works of Victor Turner, in the framework of symbolic/ritual social theory as basic analysis. Turner says that the ideational content of religions is usually connected to metaphysical ideas that are embedded in social practices and articulated by collective identities and wider cultural discourses. This analysis combines hermeneutic textual interpretation with sociological perspectives in order to bridge the history of philosophical thought with contemporary society. This helps in overcoming the gap existing between historical-philosophical investigation and socio-cultural contextualisation.

4. Results

4.1. Historical Traces of the Transformation of *Wujūdīyah* Thought

The early *Wujūdīyah* thought by Hamzah Fansuri, the main founder of Malay Sufism, articulates the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujūd* in using the local language vernaculars and symbolic systems. His writings, such as *Asrār al-ʿArifīn*, *Sharāb al-ʿĀshiqīn*, and his Sufi poems, are a good example of the imaginative work of constructing content to absorb Ibn al-ʿArabī's teaching into the Malay intellectual atmosphere.²⁰ He did not merely transmit Arab-Persian metaphysical ideas but rearticulated them into one communicative spiritual-epistemological model. This was done by employing specific Malay aesthetic devices, such as nautical metaphors, boat voyages, and the proper symbols depicting spiritual wayfaring.

During this period, what Thahir called a Malay metaphysic began to emerge. It elaborated on the necessary metaphysical notions, such as *tajallī*, *martabat al-wujūd*, and *insān kāmīl* within the

¹⁷ Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 210.

¹⁸ M. H. Ilias, *Research in the Islamic Context* (London: Routledge, 2022), 189–96, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003244912>.

¹⁹ Jens Zimmermann, "Confusion of Horizons: Gadamer and the Christian Logos," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 22, no. 1 (2001): 87–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617670120039275>.

²⁰ Ery Adatta Barus, and Sri Mawaddah, "History of Arabic-Malay Writing: Cultural Heritage and Islamic Identity in the Archipelago," *Socius: Journal of Social Sciences Research* 12, no. 2 (2025): 737–741, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15715947>.

ontological network between man and God.²¹ A first tentative diagnosis in this line is the cosmological reading of the texts in this study. Nature can mean a plane of existence where that Divine being manifests itself, and humans are placed in relation to their function as conduits through which this expression is manifested.

The history of *Wujūdīyah* thought in the 17th century also experienced significant changes in the socio-political context, especially in the Aceh Sultanate. Nuruddin al-Raniri's rejection of the writings of Fansuri was a transitional era between intellectual conflict and power plays for religious and political authority.²² This is a period of recalibrating *Wujūdīyah*, which was long considered to be the most essential doctrine in Sufism but has become increasingly controversial.

Kitagawa does not view this phase as simply an episode of theological dissent in her essay. Rather, she views this as a battleground of discursive struggle where the rational-legalistic model of the *'ālim* was contested by intellectual scholars engaging in spiritual shapes of emanations from Sufi *tasawwuf*.²³ Yet Fansuri's ideas did not disappear but were circulated via native ulama networks and oral traditions beyond the major centres of power. The events of the 17th century read as an epistemic negotiation in which both camps signal the ability of *Wujūdīyah* to adapt to changing political/religious landscapes.

During the colonial period, the transmission modes of *Wujūdīyah* ideas changed from royal patronage to *'ulamā'*- and community-based transmission patterns. Fansuri's metaphysical teachings have entered into networks of Islamic boarding schools, prayer houses, and Sufi orders (*Syattariyah* and *Sammaniyah*). These have kept *Wujūdīyah* tradition as a source for ethical formation and spiritual discipline in their practices.²⁴ This change could be seen as indicative of an ethos of "ethicization" in *Wujūdīyah*, from the largely metaphysical dimensions of *Wujūd* to a more practice-oriented dimension. This is indicated by the use of terms, such as *dhikr*, *sulūk*, and the implicit cultivation of a religious consciousness.

In the modern period, *Wujūdīyah* has been revived because of philological inquiries, academic investigation, and modern hermeneutics. This is an argument that has been revived by scholars, particularly by Al-Attas himself, Johns, and several other modern investigators of the Malay world, about the place of *Wujūdīyah* in Malay intellectual history. Most importantly, Chamadi et al.'s research and Fansuri's own thought are shaped by the environments in which people live (identity discourse, modern spirituality, and civilizational studies).²⁵

The results of this study showed three main trends in *Wujūdīyah* today:

- Re-reading philosophically, that is, to return to the idea of *waḥdat al-wujūd* from

²¹Lukman S. Thahir, "Islam of the Archipelago: Cosmopolitanism of Islamic Civilization in Indonesia," *Futura Islamic Scientific Journal* 21, no. 1 (2021): 23, <https://doi.org/10.22373/fisj.v0i0.5794>.

²²Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid, "The Impact of Sufism on Muslims in Pre-Colonial Malaysia: An Overview of Interpretations," *Islamic Studies* 41, no. 3 (2002): 467–493.

²³Kitagawa, *The Religious Traditions of Asia*, ed. Joseph Kitagawa (Routledge, 2023), 101-105, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315029641>.

²⁴Mohamad Nasrin Mohamad Nasir, "Convergences and Divergences in Understanding a Malay Sufi Text of the 17th Century," *ICR Journal* 7, no. 3 (2016): 399–410, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v7i3.251>.

²⁵Muhamad Riza Chamadi et al., "Reading Islam in Western Media: Hermeneutic Perspectives and the Hybridity of Southeast Asian Muslim Cultures," *Suhuf* 37, no. 2 (2025): 254–63, <https://doi.org/10.23917/suhuf.v37i2.11850>.

phenomenological, linguistic, and contemporary ethical standpoints.

- Textual revitalization: the preparation of critical editions of manuscripts, digitization of archival materials, and integration of these in the curriculum of Malay-Islamic studies.
- Sociocultural relevance: *Wujūdīyah* has emerged as a significant component of the discourse on Malay identity in Indonesia and Malaysia, especially in response to the rise of religious puritanism.

One of the main claims of Mirzakhimov in his recent scholarship is that the current interpretations of the *Wujūdīyah* tradition are an epistemic bridge that connects the historical Sufi spirituality with the spiritual needs of the present. In the twenty-first century, with the advent of digital communication, the modes of transmission, interpretation, and practice of the *Wujūdīyah* tradition have changed. This has caused new types of religious communication and spiritual participation.²⁶ This may allow for their greater discovery by a wider readership and the possibility of amplification in larger scholarly readings that engage them with these texts through the posting of their manuscripts on your own copies or allow for public engagement with their intellectual legacy. Major archival projects or international cooperation, as is currently being done at the National Library of Indonesia, often offer digitized copies of a considerable part of classical Sufi texts in their holdings.²⁷

Meanwhile, scholars have recontextualized the teachings of *Wujūdīyah* for modern audiences. Moreover, the wider accessibility of spiritual discourse on social media platforms and online religious forums has helped Sufi discourse reach a much larger audience. In this digital context, *Wujūdīyah* has been seen not simply as a metaphysical doctrine but as an ethical spirituality, a high road to inner purification and compassion, as well as to the oneness of existence.²⁸

Another important development is the emergence of “Urban Sufism” in the largest cities, such as Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur (KL). More and more, urban Muslim communities, especially among the educated middle class, have embraced elements of classical Sufi teachings and metaphysical dispositions associated with *Wujūdīyah* as a popular way of responding to present-day urban spiritual anxieties. Hence, *Wujūdīyah* in this sense is less a speculative metaphysical system and more so serves as a mode of spiritual introspection and ethical consciousness.

Table 1. Historical Transformation of *Wujūdīyah* Thought from the Sixteenth to the Twenty-First Century

Period	Historical–Cultural Context	Forms of Transformation in <i>Wujūdīyah</i> Thought
16 th Century (Initial Formulation)	The Aceh Sultanate functioned as a major intellectual centre, accompanied by the development of the Malay- <i>Jawi</i>	The conceptualization of waḥdat al-wujūd, with the adaptation of the teachings of Ibn al-‘Arabī and the incorporation of Sufi metaphors in

²⁶Bakhtiyor Mirzakhimov, “The Essence of the Concept of Wahdat Al-Wujud in Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi’s Sufism: An Analysis Based on the ‘Risalat Al-Wujudiyya,’” *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 15, no. 1 (2025): 99–112, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.151.06>.

²⁷Annabel Teh Gallop, “Shifting Landscapes: Remapping the Writing Traditions of Islamic Southeast Asia through Digitisation,” *Humaniora* 32, no. 2 (2020): 97–109, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v32i2.55487>.

²⁸Dindin Solahudin, and Moch Fakhruroji, “Internet and Islamic Learning Practices in Indonesia: Social Media, Religious Populism, and Religious Authority,” *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2019): 19, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010019>.

Period	Historical–Cultural Context	Forms of Transformation in <i>Wujūdīyah</i> Thought
	language.	Malay literary traditions, was an important phase in the intellectual development of <i>Wujūdīyah</i> .
17 th century (Contestation of Orthodoxy)	Religious regulation under Sultan Iskandar Thani was marked by the consolidation of a more rigorous <i>fiqh</i> -oriented framework.	Then came a period of rejection and purification of <i>Wujūdīyah</i> manifested in the curtailment of its teachings by fatwas and the rise of theological debates on the basis of an orthodox orientation.
18 th –19 th Centuries (Colonial Adaptation)	This period also witnessed a transition from royal authority to the ' <i>ulamā</i> ' community, alongside increasing European colonial penetration.	Later, the tradition was ethicized, as shown by its channelling through Sufi orders (i.e., <i>Syattariyah</i> and <i>Sammaniyah</i>) and its preservation in institutions, such as <i>surau</i> and <i>pesantren</i> .
20 th Century (Academization and Modernization)	In the modern period, philological inquiry and intellectual historical studies conducted by contemporary scholars have coincided with the rise of Malay nationalism.	Lately, <i>Wujūdīyah</i> has been subject to academic reinterpretation, attempts at critical edition making, and reconstruction of its intellectual history.
21 st Century (Digital Revitalization)	More recently, the advent of digitized manuscripts, the proliferation of online Islamic discourse, and the emergence of urban Sufi communities have all conspired to redefine the trajectory of <i>Wujūdīyah</i> .	The internet distribution of <i>Wujūdīyah</i> texts, their reformulation in academic exchanges on social media platforms, and their adaptation in Urban Sufism movements in recent years have shown that, as a spiritual practice, it is still relevant to contemporary spiritual questions.

Source: Contemporary Islamic discourse in the Malay-Indonesian world (2022)

4.2. Adaptation of *Wujūdīyah* in Malay Religious Culture

According to the results of a textual analysis carried out by Jacob and Mamat, Malay Muslim group interpreted the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* into ritual and devotional practices centred on the ontological closeness of human beings to the Divine.²⁹ *Dhikr*, *ratib*, *wirid*, and *sulūk* within the various *ṭarīqa* traditions have served as the principal sites in which these teachings have been internalized. In some *ṭarīqa* communities in Aceh, Langkat, and Kedah, the Unity of Existence concept that originally appeared as an instrument of philosophical contemplation has been redefined into a spiritual principle based on humility (*tawāḍu*), simplicity, and inward discipline.³⁰

Both of these teachings continue to be reflected in Malay literature and other cultural expressions. Motifs, such as sea, waves, and inner journeys which are prominent in the literary style of Fansuri, have been characterized by metaphysical use of a body or mind rooted in the traditions of

²⁹Yacob and Mamat, "Sufism Network in the Malay World: A Historical Overview." 51.

³⁰Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and Neo-Sufism in Indonesia Today," *RIMA: Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2022): 1–24.

poetics, narrative forms, and *gurindam*.³¹ The use of these metaphors is not only clear evidence of the intellectual legacy left by *Wujūdīyah*, it also shows how cultural tools have helped them in their absorption into the ethos of society.

To the fine arts and architecture, as 17th-century Acehese calligraphy did to adorn traditional Malay mosques, the idea of unity is expressed through *tawhīd*'s geometrical patterns, most notably through floral and organic curves. These symbolize unity between the external cosmos and a transcendent reality. Likewise, the literary tradition had been a significant medium for the propagation of the teachings of *Wujūdīyah*.³² The fusion of Sufi aesthetics and the doctrine of the unity of existence, especially in the use of cosmological metaphors, such as the sea, waves, voyages, and spiritual journeys, all characteristics of Fansurian literary expression, marks Malay poetry and narrative forms.³³

Syair Perahu suggests the idea of inner journey and its connection to *tazkiyat al-nafs*, while its "ocean of existence" is an ontological symbol of human relation to God. Not only are these metaphors poetic ornaments but pedagogical instruments for the translation of metaphysical principles into ethical and spiritual guidance for the larger community.³⁴ In the same way, the narrative texts, such as Hikayat Aceh and Hikayat Nur Muhammad also bear the traces of *Wujūdīyah* thought in the form of emanative cosmology, the stories of creation, and the unity of divine light, which is similar to the construction of Nūr Muḥammad in Sufi metaphysics.³⁵

Interestingly, *Wujūdīyah* teachings were embedded in basic cultural principles in Malay contexts, such as *adat bersendi syarak* and *syarak bersendi Kitabullah* (custom is based on *Shariah*; *Shariah* based on Book of God). The principle is an example of sociological construction of social ethic and spiritual doctrine in Malay society through the conceptualization of the relationship between this world and the hereafter, which is related to the *Wujūdīyah* conception of the oneness of reality.³⁶ The values of harmony (*mīzān*), propriety (*adab*), and the hierarchical ordering of human dignity are rooted in the fact that human existence is a microcosmic reflection of divine manifestation. Thus, ethical behaviour towards others is construed as a behaviour towards the Divine, producing an ethical

³¹Ihsanudin Ihsanudin, and Aimmatul Muslimah, "Interferensi Morfologis Puisi Ruba'I Hamzah Fansuri," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 17, no. 1 (2017): 91, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v17i1.924>.

³²Nurhaya Baniyamin, Zumahiran Kamaruddin, and Rajabi Abdul Razak, "Unity and Multiplicity in Islamic Geometric and Calligraphic Expression: A Photographic and Visual Journey of Space in Nusantara Mosques," *Cultural Syndrome* 1, no. 1 (2019): 22–33, <https://doi.org/10.30998/cs.v1i1.20>.

³³Vladimir Braginsky, "Meaning of the Sound: Magic and Sufi Mysticism in the Phonic Structure of the Malay Charm and Chant," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 34, no. 100 (2006): 281–314, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639810601130168>.

³⁴M. Ahsin, and M. Alfatih Suryadilaga, "Sufistic Interpretation of Hadith Through Literature in the Poetry Perahu by Hamzah Fansuri," *Journal of the Study of Al-Qur'an and Hadith Sciences* 21, no. 1 (020): 193–216, <https://doi.org/10.14421/qh.2020.2101-10>.

³⁵Marsuki Marsuki, Umi Sumbulah, and Helmi Syaifuddin, "The Network of Middle Eastern and Archipelagic Sufi Scholars: Tracing the Dynamics of Sufism Development in Indonesia," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 13, no. 2 (2024): 355–76, <https://doi.org/10.21580/tos.v13i2.19064>.

³⁶Nor Huda, "Continuity And Change of the Islamic Intellectual Discourse in Indonesia Malay World," *Journal of Malay Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2018): 147–166, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jmis.v2i2.2542>.

paradigm that is perfectly aligned with the concept of *insān kāmil* in *Wujūdīyah*.³⁷

One of the most important results of this study is about how religious institutions, such as *dayah*, *pesantren*, and traditional *madrasah* embrace *Wujūdīyah* teachings in their syllabus. While many of these traditional educational institutions faced opposition during the colonial and postcolonial periods, some have survived in their efforts to preserve and transmit the works of Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani through *ṭarīqa*-based interpretation and *ma'rifa*-oriented pedagogy. This method does not diminish the importance of teaching theory, and hence of Sufi gnosis but it does maintain that purification of the soul is part of the access to any higher forms of Sufi knowledge.³⁸

Wujūdīyah, as it has been adapted institutionally in Malaysia, has been more heavily regulated under the powerful tides of twentieth-century Islamic reforms.³⁹ However, research conducted by Abdurahman reveals that such teachings have been endured through routes of Sufi teachers consisting of the *Naqshbandīyah* and *Sammanīyah* orders. These advocate a tempered approach to *Wujūdīyah* consistent with the theoretical backdrop of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*.⁴⁰

4.3. Acceptance and Resistance in Indonesia–Malaysia

Indonesia depicts a broader process of reception of *Wujūdīyah*, underpinned to a great extent by the complex character of Islam in that area, which emphasizes Sufism and is absorbed into local layers of culture rather than determinedly shaped by state power. Since the sixteenth century, networks of '*ulamā*' have nurtured a fluid and tolerant model of religious pluralism in the Nusantara. Thus, this enables both *waḥdat al-wujūd* and similar metaphysical doctrines to be embraced as components of Islamic boarding school's intellectual identity.⁴¹

Within the large *pesantren* tradition, Sufi works by Ibn 'Arabī, al-Jīlī, and Hamzah Fansuri have not been entirely disallowed as part of a spiritual curriculum but neither are they systematically presented as formal dogma. In this context, clerics who belong to *Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)* generally do not view *Wujūdīyah* as a public theology rather, see it as a higher level of spiritual realization. This, in turn, would lessen the potential for theological-academic tension, unlike in the Malaysian case.⁴² In this case, the understanding of the practices of *sulūk*, *murāqabah*, and *mushāhadah* in some Islamic boarding schools that are associated with *Shattariyah* orders (and even *Naqshbandīyah*) is grounded in the idea of oneness and existence in the *iḥsān* normative arrangement rather than interpreting these as pantheism. Such an interpretative nature allows *Wujūdīyah*, as a spiritual content of the community, to be instrumental in sharpening inner sentimentality and moral awareness within the society.⁴³

³⁷Khoirul Amru Harahap, "Hamzah Al-Fansuri: A Figure of Malay-Indonesian Philosophical Mysticism and Sufi Literature," *International Conference of Moslem Society* 2, no. 1 (2018): 33–42, <https://doi.org/10.24090/icms.2018.1847>.

³⁸Syaifan Nur and Dudung Abdurahman, "Sufism of Archipelago: History, Thought, and Movement," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 18, no. 2 (2017): 123–33, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v18i2.1476>.

³⁹Arifka, "The Concept of God in Malay Sufi Literature," 12.

⁴⁰Dudung Abdurahman, "Islam, Sufism, and Character Education in Indonesia History," *Tawarikh: Journal of Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 159–76, <https://doi.org/10.2121/tawarikh.v9i2.1013>.

⁴¹Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara: Jaringan Global dan Lokal* [Islam Nusantara: Global and Local Networks] (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), 214.

⁴²Martin Van Bruinessen, "Studies of Sufism and the Sufi Orders in Indonesia," *Die Welt Des Islams* 38, no. 2 (1998): 192–219, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1570744>.

⁴³Howell, *Revitalised Sufism and the New Piety Movements in Islamic Southeast Asia*, 198.

The absorption of *Wujūdīyah* into cultural traditions is reflected in literary tradition, native artistic expression of *dhikr*, a form of *hikayat*, and rituals or customary practices that developed in the Aceh and West Sumatra regions, as well as in Java. The metaphysical teachings were not aggressively theological. However, these teachings were domesticated by being made non-controversial and were integrated into daily religious life by passing through filtration systems in symbolic and cultural forms. It would also have contributed to the public acceptance of the *Wujūdīyah* tradition in Indonesia.⁴⁴

It also becomes clear that the transformation of *Wujūdīyah* thought in the plural socio-religious setting that is centred on the major Islamic organizations of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah* is a modern one. For comparison, in this context of decentralized religious authority, *Wujūdīyah* as an official theological doctrine is often not set so rigidly. Rather, it is in the line of being viewed as a part of the greater heritage that makes up the *Istiqra*, or Islamic intellectual and spiritual heritage in *Islam Nusantara*.

Sufi ideas are preserved in the *pesantren* tradition and passed down through kitab kuning. These teachings are always interpreted within the ethical-spiritual system of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* and *iḥsān*, so that *Wujūdīyah* can operate as a sophisticated form of spiritual discourse without the peril of theological turbulence within the *Sunni* framework.⁴⁵

In this context, Muhammadiyah promotes reform of scriptures and rational theology but does not formally accept *Wujūdīyah* metaphysics into its doctrine. However, it has also recognized the moral and cultural part of Sufism in Indonesian Islamic culture that should be embedded in *Islam Berkemajuan* (translated literally as progressive Islam or an Islam which combines spiritual gospel with social ethics).⁴⁶

The dynamics show that the change in *Wujūdīyah* in Indonesia is primarily aimed at reinterpreting cultural aspects rather than formally institutionalizing its doctrine. In this multi-religious context, the intellectual heritage of Hamzah Fansuri contributes to the formation of a moderate Islam that is open to cultural diversity and spiritual depth.

The idiosyncratic patterns of the reaction in Indonesia and Malaysia suggest that the reception of *Wujūdīyah* teachings is not simply a matter of its internal features. However, it is strongly conditioned by the specific configuration of religious authority that structures Sufi discourse. The decentralized nature of religious authority in Indonesia (see also the role of *pesantren*, organizations such as *Nahdlatul Ulama*, and local scholar networks) provides greater space for philosophical Sufism.

In Malaysia, the centralized system of religious authority, including bodies, such as the Malaysian Islamic Development Department (JAKIM) and the National Fatwa Council, has made the regulation of religious teachings more organized and more focused towards Shāfiʿī orthodoxy. The institutional framework has led to a tendency towards rigid restrictions on metaphysical doctrines, such as *Wujūdīyah*, which are believed to lead to doctrinal uncertainty. Thus, responses to this tradition are often permitted with many restrictions and with much caution, creating lesser space for

⁴⁴Muzakkir Syahrul and Ziaulhaq Hidayat, "New Face of Contemporary Sufism in Southeast Asia: Experience of Indonesia and Malaysia," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 11, no. 2 (2021): 270–92, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2021.11.2.270-292>.

⁴⁵Julia Day Howell, and Martin van Bruinessen, eds., *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 119.

⁴⁶Theguh Saumantri et al., "Tolerance in the Theology of Islamic Reform: A Hermeneutic Reading of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's Thought," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 27, no. June (2025): 160–70, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.27.2025.326>.

its expression than the greater fluidity of Indonesia.

These observations are consistent with Bruinessen's⁴⁷ view, that there are generally two types of Sufism in South East Asia. First, a cultural-communitarian model that allows flexibility and local adaptations (e.g., Indonesia). Second, a doctrinal-state model that emphasizes institutional regulation and doctrinal consistency as in Malaysia.⁴⁸ The results validate these two models but also indicate their limitations. The results show how the *Wujūdīyah* tradition, as a complex expression of metaphysical Sufism, developed organically in relation to the institutional contexts and systems of religious governance that dominated each country. This observation confirms that the dynamics of the *Wujūdīyah* responses are not simply theological but are about clashes between doctrinal systems, schools of thought, and forms of religious authority at the national-state level.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Meaning of the Transformation of *Wujūdīyah* Thought

This is a certain preservation of epistemic vitality from the perspective of the *longue durée*, from its emergence in the sixteenth century through Hamzah Fansuri, and further into contemporarity. *Wujūdīyah* is not a frozen tradition that has merely survived countless battles with the religious authorities but is continually re-formulated, thus ensuring its survival within Malay religious life. Here, *Wujūdīyah* demonstrates its flexibility, reacting flexibly to changes in the historical context.⁴⁹ These teachings were uncovered early in the *Wujūdīyah* element, grounded and philosophically expressed in the Sufism of two earlier figures, Hamzah Fansuri from Sumatra and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, who relied heavily on the thought of Ibn 'Arabī. However, they are revised, this time to make the abstract metaphysical ideas of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, *tajallī* (or *al-tajallī*), the seven ranks, and *insān kāmil* more accessible to the Malay masses in vernacular language and literature.⁵⁰

This adaptation lasted until the 17th century, when theological critiques by figures, such as Nuruddin al-Raniri emerged. Rather than disappearing, *Wujūdīyah* underwent a process of "orthodoxization," that is, it was rearticulated by being incorporated into the normative frameworks of Shāfi'ī law and Ash'arī theology.⁵¹ This suggests that the development of *Wujūdīyah* was not simply an extension of the intellectual legacy of Ibn 'Arabī, rather, it had negotiated its way through epistemology to continue living in a new and more restrictive religious environment.

An even greater intellectual manifestation of "orthodoxization" was demonstrated in the works of 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkilī from the late-17th century. Al-Sinkilī does not deny the metaphysical views of Ibn 'Arabī but attempts to reinterpret them within an understanding that seeks to reconcile the unity of *sharī'a*, *ṭarīqa*, and *ḥaqīqa*. His writings continue to show a constant effort towards reconciling Sufi metaphysical ideas with the *Sunni* orthodoxy, especially influenced by the Shāfi'ī legal tradition and Ash'arī theology in particular. This change of *Wujūdīyah* can be considered a survival mechanism, the Islamization, and transmogrification of philosophical Sufism into the *Sunni* Islamic normative basis upon which politics and social life in Malay lands rested.⁵²

Under the modern era characterized by the prevalence of *puritan* and reformist Islamic

⁴⁷Howell, and van Bruinessen, *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, 105.

⁴⁸Braginsky, "Meaning of the Sound: Magic and Sufi Mysticism in the Phonic Structure of the Malay Charm and Chant," 89.

⁴⁹Naquib al-Attas, *Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri*, 97.

⁵⁰Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: UTM Press, 2014), 201.

⁵¹Johns, "Sufism as a Category," 10–23.

⁵²Azyumardi Azra, *Islam Nusantara Global and Local Network* (Bandung: Mizan, 2021), 190.

discourses in the archipelago, *Wujūdīyah* was again transformed. Across many *madrasahs* and Sufi orders, this teaching was reinterpreted as a spiritual path that could focus on polishing good manners and ethical behaviour rather than merely speculating on metaphysics. This aspect of the transition also shows that *Wujūdīyah* could respond to modern demands while maintaining its core spiritual line.⁵³

Next, *Wujūdīyah* needs to be studied in relation to the transregional intellectual networks in which middle Malay-*Nusantara* scholars played a central role in disseminating, critiquing, and revitalizing these teachings. Azra has shown how the principal routes of transmission of networks of Sufism that focused on the intellectual legacies of Ibn 'Arabī took place between scholars in Aceh, Minangkabau, Palembang, Patani (now southern Thailand), Kelantan, and Banjar, and the scholarly centres of Mecca and Medina. In addition to textual materials, the returnees from the *Hijāz* brought interpretive frames and discursive traditions that were later adapted to local socio-cultural contexts.⁵⁴

Philosophical Sufism was a highly literary form. Scholars, such as Hamzah Fansuri used symbolic and allegorical expressions to convey mystical ideas in their prose and poetry. Later generations, especially figures, such as 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkilī, sought to bring together an intellectual heritage of Ibn 'Arabī with what some would call a “neo-Sufism,” articulated in a balance between *sharī'a* and *ḥaqīqa*. The network of ideas created a space for discourse, enabling a rearticulation of *Wujūdīyah* across literature, theology, Sufism, and pedagogy.⁵⁵ A key feature of these networks was the mobility of the scholars among themselves, which allowed *Wujūdīyah* not only to be conceived as a metaphysic but more critically, as a living tradition whose ideas were constantly produced and reproduced through exchange and reinterpretation.⁵⁶

However, *Wujūdīyah* is not always explicitly articulated in systematic doctrinal work, except in poetry (such as *dhikr* and *ṣalawāt*), *sulūk*, and *ṭarīqa* ritual among the Malay community. As Jones observes, the Malay literary corpus presents images of the perfection of *insān kāmil* and *tajallī* in language more palatable to a broader audience. *Wujūdīyah* did not disappear into the sunset in the new era but its manifestations became more subdued. It turned more to moral teaching, awareness of ethical practice, and Sufi performance, which do not expose their metaphysical discourses.⁵⁷

The Malaysian interpretation of *Wujūdīyah* has been filtered through the lens of a state-controlled, institutionalised form of religious authority. Several state-linked bodies, ranging from the JAKIM to state-level fatwa councils, have issued cautious rulings against any interpretations of *waḥdat al-wujūd* that blur the line between Creator and creation. From this point of view, the claims of metaphysical Sufism have been periodically questioned in official fatwa discussions, regardless of any teaching that might be considered close to pantheistic tendencies. Such institutional responses exemplify a model of “state-regulated orthodoxy” that seeks to maintain doctrinal precision while permitting and/or encouraging limited manifestations of Sufi spirituality, or encouraged as long as

⁵³Bruinessen, “Studies of Sufism and the Sufi Orders in Indonesia,” 108–110.

⁵⁴Azra, *Ulama Network: The Middle East and the Indonesian Archipelago in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, 215.

⁵⁵Mohamad Nasir, “Convergences and Divergences in Understanding a Malay Sufi Text of the 17th Century,” 69.

⁵⁶Russell Jones, “The Origins of the Malay Manuscript Tradition,” in *Cultural Contact and Textual Interpretation* (BRILL, 1996), 121–43, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004454170_011.

⁵⁷Wahyu Nugroho, and Tan Aik Seng, “Sufism And Islamization in Malaysia: Historical Overview,” *Malaysian Journal Of Islamic Studies (MJIS)* 8, no. 2 (December 26, 2024): 55–78, <https://doi.org/10.37231/mjis.2024.8.2.277>.

they occur under the umbrella of *Sunni* theological parameters.⁵⁸

There are two contributions to the intellectual history of *Wujūdīyah* transformation in Malay-*Nusantara*. More importantly, it shows that local Islamic traditions should not be seen as derivatives of central Islamic authorities but as creative and independent intellectual traditions. The main language, Malay, is based on unique local cosmological expressions. The *Syair Perahu*, *Asrār al-ʿArifīn*, and the *martabat tujuh* texts contribute to the broader landscape of Islamic civilization by providing local articulations of knowledge by Muslim thinkers in the *Nusantara*. Second, this transformation entails that *Wujūdīyah* is not a local phenomenon but one member of an intertextual global intellectual discursive continuum, which is continuously rearticulated in different historical and cultural contexts.

5.2. *Wujūdīyah*'s Contribution to Malay Islamic Civilization

The emergence of Malay-Islamic identity cannot be separated from the influence of cosmology of *Wujūdīyah* in the process of Islamization and the construction of indigenous religious discourses. The 16th and 17th centuries are the zenith of intellectual culture, with distinguished scholars, such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani, when *waḥdat al-wujūd* was first formulated in Malay and included in religious texts.⁵⁹ This clearly shows that the Malay language is not only a means of communication but an epistemological tool that influences the thought and the spiritual orientation of the society.

The construction of Malay-Islamic identity in *Wujūdīyah* is mediated by the metaphysical traditions of Ibn ʿArabī. Here, Islam is not merely a legalistic inheritance; it is the way of self-perfection (*insān kāmil*), of returning to ourselves as beings deeply embedded in the Divine.⁶⁰ Therefore, the construction of Malay-Islamic identity is based on the union of humble, Sufi-based ethics with one that acknowledges the human dependency on God ontologically.

These ethical and spiritual principles, in the Indonesian context today, have gained wider resonance in the discourse surrounding religious moderation, which is encouraged by both state institutions and Islamic organizations. The theological foundations of *insān kāmil*, *adab*, and the concept of divine immanence provide a religious approach to tolerance in lifestyle, married with humility and respect for one another in a plural society. The divine character of everything is easier to see, and it is easier to get along with others, even those belonging to other faiths.⁶¹

However, *Wujūdīyah* can be seen as one of the indigenous theological frameworks in Indonesia to respond to contemporary religious moderation agendas. It places spiritual transformation, as well as moral conduct and a consciousness of divine unity, in accordance with the broader efforts. Apart from history and theology, the results of the study have broader implications for Islamic Studies and socio-cultural studies in Indonesia and Malaysia. For example, the transformation of *Wujūdīyah* thought is a case in point that Islamic metaphysics was not merely simplistic speculative theology. It

⁵⁸ Pankaj Kumar Jha, "Religious Assertion in Malaysia: Constrained or Conflagrated?," *Strategic Analysis* 33, no. 6 (2019): 890–902, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160903255897>.

⁵⁹ Stephen Hirtenstein, "Cosmogonic Myths in Sufism," in *Sufi Cosmology* (BRILL, 2022), 47–67, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004392618_004.

⁶⁰ Sumanta, "Insan Kamil-Based Development to Improve Character and Academic Competency in Indonesian Islamic Universities," *Dynamics of Science* 22, no. 1 (2022): 131–149, <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v22i1.4968>.

⁶¹ Bisri et al., "Navigating Modern Challenges: The Practical Role of Triple-Relationship of Religious Moderation through an Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14, no. 2 (2024): 286–302, <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.142.17>.

was a lively part of the intellectual life of modern Muslim society.

In addition, this research added to scholarship on socio-culture with respect to Indonesia and Malaysia to substantiate that the reception of *Wujūdīyah* thought is strongly mediated by the interplay of structures of religious authority and tradition in each society. Indonesia, a country without a centralized Islamic authority, and an institutionally strong civil society closely integrated with diverse *pesantren* networks, has been culturally subsumed into the more general category of Islam *Nusantara*. By contrast, in Malaysia, with a more centralized and institutionally integrated form of religious authority, interpretations of metaphysical *Sufi* doctrines are much more tightly regulated within the limits of *Sunni* orthodoxy.

5.3. The Contest of *Wujūdīyah* Teachings and the Reconstruction of Contemporary Spirituality

Wujūdīyah thought does not simply represent a linear and unproblematic development in the Malay-Islamic intellectual tradition. It was strongly linked to ever-evolving social, political, and religious dynamics from the pre-colonial period to the contemporary era. *Wujūdīyah* was one of the most influential trends in Islamic mysticism found in the Malay region since the 17th century through teachers, such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syamsuddin al-Sumatrani. In the modern era, however, such contestation has taken on new meanings, moving beyond theological disputes specifically recalling the Divine versus creation to issues surrounding religious identity, the authority of the '*ulamā*', and nation-state politics.

This study argued progressively that the transformation of *Wujūdīyah* cannot be understood in isolation from the socio-religious institutions and political structures within Indonesia and Malaysia. However, it can be comprehended with a comparative analytical framework developed from the contents of this study itself. The unevenness of the presence of *Wujūdīyah* in this age of modernity is most pronounced, the central tension being the interaction between two major modes of thought. First, *Wujūdīyah* was seen as a metaphysical language of symbolic significance, an instance of the intimacy between humans and God, spread in the tradition of spiritual Islam through *Sufi* divans, networks of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), and Malay studies. Metaphysical expressions, such as *wahdat al-wujūd*, are usually paired with cognate terms, such as *tajallī* or even *wahdat alshuhūd*. However, this is to explore the relationship of spirituality that tradition understands as nonduality, more experiential than ontological identity within this paradigm.⁶²

The second current consists of reformist and literalist movements that put much emphasis on strict textual interpretations of Islamic doctrine and often reject the metaphysical language associated with philosophical Sufism. The diffusion of Salafi reformism and the consolidation of institutional religious authority in a number of Muslim-majority states have led to the increasing prominence of these movements in the 20th century. By contrast, Malaysia has a different institutional configuration. Religious authority is more centralized and linked to state institutions, namely the State Islamic Councils and the *JAKIM*. It provides a mechanism for formal doctrinal review of religious teachings to ensure they conform to the officially approved state interpretation of *Sunni* orthodoxy.

Metaphysical doctrines associated with *Wujūdīyah* have therefore often been subjected to heightened scrutiny and, in some contexts, treated as heretical when articulated in terms that appear to efface the distinction between God and mankind. It shows the significant effect of institutionalizing religious authority on the reception and reiteration of classical *Sufi* doctrines. Thus, this research is one of the main findings of the comparative study of Indonesia and Malaysia. However, although *Wujūdīyah* is rooted in a common Malay-Islamic inspirational lineage, its present manifestations

⁶²Arifka, "The Concept of God in Malay Sufi Literature," 17.

differ due to varying socio-political contexts and arrangements of religious governance. The result is not only about the theological content of arrogant metaphysical traditions, such as *Wujūdīyah*, but also, and perhaps more decisively, about the institutional and cultural contexts in which to interpret and feel them, which makes them endure.

5.4. Conclusion

The current study argued that the metaphysics of *Wujūdīyah* has never been rigid but open-ended, a process of constant reinterpretation and appropriation of new forces in relation to changing social and political structures. This includes intertwinements with shifts in local contexts of religious authority in Indonesia and Malaysia. The history of *Wujūdīyah* since its introduction in the 16th century has been complicated. Popular at times, doctrinally consolidated in the colonial and early state periods, dogmatically opposed in the time of al-Rānīrī, and, in contemporary religious practice, has recently enjoyed a cultural revival. This study makes a case for a multidisciplinary approach to the transformation of *Wujūdīyah*: hermeneutical textual analysis, historical contextualization, and comparative socio-religious analysis, as a dialogue between intellectual traditions, cultural practices, and intractable assets of institutionalized religious authority. An examination of the two countries further shows that the reception of *Wujūdīyah* is tied to the nature of religious rule in both contexts. The *Wujūdīyah* still has a place in the intellectual/spiritual history of *Nusantara*, where in Indonesia, many realities of semi-pluralistic religious authority and civil society institutions (*pesantren* and Islamic organizations) are intricately woven into one another. However, in Malaysia, religious authority is more centralized and institutionally embedded in the state, such as in the form of metaphysical doctrines (such as *Wujūdīyah*). This divergence also demonstrates the importance of the institutional context of the characteristics of Islamic intellect and intellectualism in contemporary Muslim societies. Thus, *Wujūdīyah* has been the main factor in the making and shaping of Malay-Islamic values and spirituality through the ages.

Author Contribution

Hajam: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, supervision. **Ahmad Asmuni:** conceptualization, methodology, data curation. **Che Zarrina Sa'ari:** methodology, data curation. **Zaenal Mutaqin:** investigation, data curation, validation, writing – original draft. **Wulandari:** resources, writing – original draft. **Ihsan Sa'dudin:** formal analysis, interpretation, validation, writing – original draft. **Eka Safitri:** writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest related to the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The corresponding author will make the data supporting the findings of this study available upon reasonable request.

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