

KHAIRUDIN ALJUNIED

CONTEMPLATING SUFISM

DIALOGUE AND TRADITION ACROSS
SOUTHEAST ASIA



WILEY Blackwell

Exploring Sufi sites and seminaries, Professor Aljunied vividly describes how a dialogic tradition facilitated the formation of a Sufi habitus and life form across Muslim-majority Southeast Asia. The work deftly articulates the synergies between Sufis and the wider public, showing how such dynamics infused increasingly powerful mediums and popular forms of mass mobilization during the colonial and post-colonial eras.

Armando Salvatore
*Barbara and Patrick Keenan Chair in Interfaith Studies,
McGill University, Canada*

At once personal and scholarly, this book shows how Sufis were engaged in dual dialogues—with themselves and their surroundings—that made them agents of social change in Southeast Asia's past and present alike. Paying equal attention to devotion and miracles, and no less, the political and martial aspects of Sufi activism, Aljunied explains why Islam remains so important in the region today.

Nile Green
*Ibn Khaldun Endowed Chair in World History at the
University of California, Los Angeles*

Splendidly written and accessible, Khairudin Aljunied tells a lively and engaging story of Muslim piety, metaphysics, and politics as an integral part of Islamic thought and practice in Southeast Asia. Readers will gain a profound and nuanced understanding of Islam in a region with the world's largest Muslim population. A compelling read!

Ebrahim Moosa
*Mirza Family Professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim
Societies at the University of Notre Dame, USA*

This book expands the study of Sufism by examining its historical and social impact in Southeast Asia. Aljunied provides a compelling methodology, deepening our understanding of the factors contributing to Sufism's lasting presence in the region. An excellent resource for anyone interested in a field often overlooked by scholars of Islam.

Osman Bakar
*Al-Ghazali Chair of Epistemology and Civilizational Studies and
Renewal at the International Islamic University of Malaysia*

Aljunied presents an elegant, sobering, and masterly account of Sufism in Southeast Asia. Informed by the author's deep understanding of Muslim societies, he introduces an innovative approach – contemplative histories – that transcends biased views of Islamic spirituality. Highly original and Ghazalian in spirit, *Contemplating Sufism* is a guide and roadmap for anyone interested in historical Islam and Sufi expressions across several centuries.

Salih Çift

Professor of Islamic Studies at Bursa Uludağ University, Turkey

Contemplating Sufism

**Dialogue and Tradition Across
Southeast Asia**

KHAIRUDIN ALJUNIED

WILEY Blackwell

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For the children of Palestine.

You will be free.

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Acknowledgements

Writing this book has been my most challenging and rewarding endeavour to date. It is the result of decades living with Sufis and lengthy discussions with fellow travellers who share my fascination with the inner aspects of faith. This is the fifth in a series of monographs offering fresh perspectives on Islam in Southeast Asia. It challenges the common perception of Sufism as an esoteric, passive, and other-worldly creed that is detached from worldly issues and societal problems.¹ I question the dominant idea of Sufis as reclusive mystics, swirling dervishes, and wandering hermits. They were much more than that. Sufis were catalysts of social change and prime movers of political transformations. They shaped the ideological landscapes of their societies, created lasting memories, influenced economies, and defended liberties. I hope readers of this book will embrace this alternative view of Sufism in Southeast Asia and raise more probing questions about the contributions of Sufis to the shaping of historical Islam.

The book was mostly written in buses and trains, cabs and planes, cafes, and coffee shops, and it bears the marks of friends and fraternities. I would like to thank Bruce Lawrence, Martin van Bruinessen, Julian Millie, and Engseng Ho for their generous inputs during the early stages of writing. Bruce encouraged me to consider the interactions between global and local expressions of Sufism. He read the entire manuscript and made it sharper. Martin pointed to many useful works on the topic. Julian connected me with scholars working on interesting and emerging lines of enquiry. Engseng questioned the tentative structure of the book and forced me to rethink my approaches to Sufi pasts. I spent weeks mulling over his simple point: rethink Sufism in Southeast Asia in ways that would truly capture its innate uniqueness. I hope this book live up

¹ The following series of books provides revisionist interpretations of Islam in Southeast Asia: Khairudin Aljunied's *Muslim Cosmopolitanism: Southeast Asian Islam in Comparative Perspective* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), *Hamka and Islam* (Cornell University Press, 2018), *Islam in Malaysia: An Entwined History* (Oxford University Press, 2019), and *Shapers of Islam in Southeast Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

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Abbreviations

GOLKAR	Golongan Karya (Functional Groups)
JIB	Jong Islamieten Bond
Masyumi	Partai Majelis Syuro Muslim Indonesia (Council of Indonesian Muslim Associations)
MUI	Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Ulama Council)
NII	Negara Islam Indonesia
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Ulama)
PAKEM	Pengawas Aliran Kepercayaan Masyarakat (Coordinating Board for Monitoring Mystical Beliefs in Society)
PAS	Parti Islam se-Malaysia (Islamic Party of Malaysia)
PERTI	Persatuan Tarbiyah Islamiyah (Islamic Education Organization)
PKMM	Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (The Malay Nationalist Party)
PNU	Partai Nahdlatul Ummah (The Revival of the Ummah Party)
PULO	Patani United Liberation Movement
SI	Sarekat Islam (Islamic Association)

Glossary

<i>adab</i>	manners
<i>adat</i>	traditional customs
<i>ahlul bait</i>	family of the prophet
<i>ahlus sunnah wal jama'ah</i>	The People of the Sunnah and the Majority
<i>ahwal</i>	states
<i>Al-Insanul Kamil</i>	The Perfect Human Being
<i>aql</i>	intellect
<i>akhlaqul karimah</i>	noble character
<i>amal</i>	praxis
<i>ashiq</i>	burning love for the divine
<i>azimat</i>	amulet
<i>batin</i>	inner
<i>bay'ah</i>	oath of allegiance
<i>barakah</i>	blessings
<i>bid'ah</i>	innovations in Islam
<i>Dajjals</i>	deceitful messiahs
<i>da'wa</i>	the preaching of Islam
<i>dhawq</i>	tasting
<i>dhikr</i>	remembering
<i>dihliz</i>	threshold position
<i>dosa</i>	sins
<i>du'a</i>	invocations
<i>fana'</i>	annihilation of the self
<i>faqr</i>	poverty
<i>fasiq</i>	one who violates Islamic law
<i>fatwas</i>	religious edicts
<i>fuqaha</i>	jurists
<i>ghaflah</i>	heedlessness
<i>ghaib</i>	supernatural
<i>habaibs</i>	beloved ones with genealogical connections to the Prophet
<i>hadrat al-nabi</i>	Prophet's presence
<i>hajj</i>	pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>hajji</i>	pilgrim

<i>halal</i>	permissible
<i>hadith</i>	Prophetic sayings
<i>halaqah</i>	study circle
<i>haqiqah</i>	mystical truths
<i>hikayat</i>	rhythmic prose stories
<i>hijab</i>	veil
<i>hikmah</i>	wisdom
<i>ibadah</i>	acts of worship
<i>ihsan</i>	excellence
<i>ijazah</i>	licenses
<i>ijtihad</i>	independent reasoning
<i>ikhlas</i>	sincerity
<i>‘ilmu laduni</i>	direct knowledge from God
<i>‘ilm al-yaqin</i>	the knowledge of certainty
<i>imam</i>	leader
<i>ishara</i>	signs
<i>islah</i>	reform
<i>ittihad</i>	union with God
<i>jihad</i>	holy struggle
<i>jihad fisabilillah</i>	struggling in the path of Allah
<i>Jawi or Jawah</i>	Malay-Indonesian scholars in Makkah
<i>kafir</i>	disbelief
<i>kafirun</i>	disbelievers
<i>karamah</i>	miracles
<i>kashf</i>	unveiling
<i>kauman</i>	religious community
<i>kebatinan</i>	search for inner truth
<i>khalafi</i>	followers of the later generations
<i>khalwat</i>	solitude
<i>khauf</i>	fear
<i>khurafat</i>	superstition
<i>kitab</i>	learned treatises
<i>kraton</i>	Javanese royalty
<i>kyai</i>	religious teachers
<i>laqab</i>	honorific
<i>ma’rifah</i>	interior knowledge
<i>ma’siyah</i>	contravening Islamic law
<i>madhab</i>	school of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>mahabbah</i>	love
<i>majlis ta’lim</i>	Islamic forum
<i>manaqibs</i>	hagiographies
<i>maqam</i>	shrine

<i>maqamat</i>	spiritual station
<i>martabat tujuh</i>	seven stages of being
<i>maudhu</i>	fabricated
<i>mi'raj</i>	ascension
<i>mubah</i>	permissible
<i>mufti</i>	expounder of Islamic laws
<i>muhsinun</i>	those who achieve the highest ranks in deeds
<i>mujahadah</i>	utmost striving
<i>muraqabah</i>	mediation
<i>murids</i>	novices
<i>murshids</i>	spiritual guides
<i>mustahabb</i>	recommended
<i>musyahadah</i>	witnessing
<i>muzakarah/munadharah</i>	lengthy debates and consensus building
<i>nafs</i>	carnal self
<i>Nur Muhammad</i>	Light of Muhammad
<i>penghulus</i>	headmen
<i>perasaan</i>	feelings
<i>pondok</i>	Islamic boarding school
<i>qalb</i>	heart
<i>qanaah</i>	contentment
<i>qiyam</i>	standing
<i>rabithah</i>	relationship forged with a spiritual guide
<i>raja'</i>	hopefulness
<i>ratib</i>	collection of litanies and supplications
<i>redha</i>	acceptance
<i>riyadhah</i>	spiritual practices
<i>ruh</i>	soul
<i>ruqyah</i>	psycho-spiritual healing and spirit exorcism
<i>sabr</i>	patience
<i>sadaqah</i>	charity
<i>sakti</i>	magical powers
<i>salafi</i>	followers of predecessors
<i>sanad</i>	lineage
<i>santri</i>	religious-educated Muslim
<i>sesat</i>	wayward
<i>shahadah</i>	profession of faith
<i>shaykh</i>	master
<i>Shaykhul Islam</i>	Chief Judge
<i>sharh</i>	commentary
<i>shari'a</i>	Islamic legal and ethical code
<i>sha'ir</i>	narrative poem

<i>shaykhs</i>	masters
<i>shirk</i>	idolatrous polytheism
<i>shura</i>	consultation
<i>silat</i>	Malay combative art
<i>silsilah</i>	spiritual genealogy
<i>siyasa</i>	statecraft/governance
<i>solat</i>	prayer
<i>suluk</i>	journey
<i>Sunnah</i>	words and acts of Prophet Muhammad
<i>suraus</i>	prayer halls
<i>tafakkur</i>	contemplation
<i>tajdid</i>	renewal
<i>ta'lim</i>	teaching
<i>tamassuh</i>	touching
<i>taqlid</i>	blind obedience
<i>taqwa</i>	piety
<i>tarbiyah</i>	cultivating
<i>tariqah</i>	Sufi order
<i>tariqah sufiyah mu'tabarah</i>	legitimate Sufi brotherhoods
<i>tasawwur</i>	worldview
<i>tasbih</i>	rosary
<i>tawbah</i>	repentance
<i>tawheed</i>	oneness of God
<i>tasawwuf</i>	Sufism
<i>tawakkal</i>	trust in God
<i>tawassul</i>	intercession
<i>tok guru</i>	respected teacher
<i>turath</i>	heritage of Muslim thought
<i>ulama</i>	Muslim scholars
<i>ummah</i>	global Muslim community
<i>usul al-fiqh</i>	principles of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>uzlah</i>	seclusion
<i>wahdatul wujud</i>	unity of existence
<i>wahyu</i>	revelation from God
<i>wali</i>	saint
<i>waqf</i>	endowments
<i>wara'</i>	scrupulousness
<i>yaqazah</i>	waking visions
<i>zakah</i>	compulsory tax
<i>zahir</i>	outer
<i>zawiya</i>	integrated devotional complex
<i>ziyarah</i>	visitation
<i>zuhud</i>	renunciation of the world

List of Photos

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Illuminated frontispiece of the manuscript of *Al-Kawakib al-durriyya* by Al-Busiri made for the Sultan Qaitbay: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Burda#/media/File:Frontispiece_of_%22Al-Kawakib_al-duriyya%22_by_Al-Busiri_\(CBL_Ar_4168,_f.2a\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Burda#/media/File:Frontispiece_of_%22Al-Kawakib_al-duriyya%22_by_Al-Busiri_(CBL_Ar_4168,_f.2a).jpg)

Malaysian Muslims participate in a Maulidur Rasul parade in Putrajaya, also known as Mawlid, the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, at Putrajaya Putra Mosque: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlid#/media/File:Maulidur_Rasul_\(8413657269\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlid#/media/File:Maulidur_Rasul_(8413657269).jpg)

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A Quranic school in colonial Java: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pesantren#/media/File:COLLECTIE_TROPENMUSEUM_Een_Koranschool_op_Java_TMnr_10002385.jpg

The Silsilah of Hashimiyah-Alawiyah-Darqawiyah-Shazliyyah order.

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Fighting between Diponegoro's forces and the Dutch colonial forces in Gawok (1900 drawing): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diponegoro#/media/File:Aanval_van_de_colonne_Le_Bron_de_Vexela_op_Dipo_Negoro_nabij_Gawok.jpg

Portrait of Tuanku Imam Bonjol (1772–1864): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tuanku_Imam_Bonjol#/media/File:Portret_van_Tuanku_Imam_Bonjol.jpg

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Solawatul Burdah by Raihan viewed by 882k views: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NvYDCUaFwE>

K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, the founding father of NU organization: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasyim_Asy%27ari#/media/File:Hasyim_Asyari.jpg

Timeline of Sufism in Southeast Asia

7th–10th Centuries: Initial Contacts

Muslim travellers and traders from the Arabian Peninsula and Persianate world journeyed through maritime trade routes and the Silk Road into Southeast Asia. Islamic spirituality and practices interacted with local cultures and beliefs.

11th–13th Centuries: Gradual Spread

1028: A Muslim tombstone was discovered by archaeologists which provides evidence of a growing presence of Muslims at Pulau Tambun, Pahang, and possibly in other Malay states.

1136: Muzaffar Shah I, the Sultan of Kedah, became the earliest South-east Asian ruler to convert to Islam.

1267: Samudra-Pasai established as the first Islamic polity in region. The rulers were active in the spread of Islam in the region. They attracted scholars and traders and established diplomatic alliances with non-Muslim states and relations with Arabian, Turkic, and Persian-Islamic powers.

1281: Chinese chronicles register the arrival of two Muslims in Sumatra to the Mongol court.

1292: Marco Polo reports the existence of Muslim communities in Perlak, northern Sumatra, who lived peacefully with non-Muslims.

1270s–1310s: A Southeast Asian Sufi scholar, Abu Abdullah Mas'ud al-Jawi, is recorded to have taught in Arabia, pointing to the circulation of scholars from Southeast Asia to the Arab World.

14th–17th Centuries: Rapid Expansion

Late 14th century: Syaikh Karimul Makhdum preached Islam in the Sulu Archipelago and other parts of the Filipino islands.

1326/1386: Terengganu stone inscribed with Arabic letters confirms the lively existence of Islam in northern Malaysia. Evidence of synthesis between Hindu-Buddhist ideas with Islam is present in this historical relic.

1400–1511: Melaka rose to become one of the most influential Muslim maritime power in Southeast Asia responsible for the spread of Islam in the region and the diffusion of the Malay language as *lingua franca*.

1405–1433: Chinese Muslim Admiral Zheng He expeditions to Southeast Asia strengthened ties between Muslims in the region and the wider Muslim world. His visits led to the establishment of Chinese Muslim communities in Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, and the Philippines.

15th–16th centuries: The Wali Songo (Seven Saints) spread Sufism in Java using performative arts and creative preaching.

1511: Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah established the Acehnese Islamic kingdom, furthering Melaka's role as the leading Islamizing force in the region. Aceh became the hub of Islamic learning, a conduit for Sufism, and a powerhouse of Jawi literature.

1511: The fall of Melaka to the Portuguese paved way for Johor, Brunei, and Aceh to compete for regional dominance and to be the foremost propagator of Islam.

1560s–1590s: Hamzah Fansuri of Barus wrote Sufi poetic texts that led to the spread of Ibn 'Arabi's Sufi metaphysics into the Southeast Asia.

1607–1676: Makassar and Champa rulers converted to Islam and aided in the expanding networks of Muslim societies in Sulawesi and mainland Southeast Asia.

1637–1644: Sufi scholar, Nuruddin Al-Raniri, promoted scholarly Sufism and wrote against heretical Sufi doctrines purveyed by the followers of Hamzah Fansuri. The Rifa'iyyah order spread through Al-Raniri's active promotion of its teachings.

1613–1645: Sultan Agung, a devout Sufi, a votary of Javanese mysticism, and a gifted war strategist, expanded the kingdom of Mataram by waging holy war against Hindu-Buddhist polities.

1650s: European encroachment into Southeast Asia triggered a variety of responses from Sufis, from armed rebellions to intellectual combat to strategic cooperation. Prominent Sufis such as Yusuf al-Makassari led revolts and were sent for exile.

18th–21st Centuries – Modernity and Renewal

Early 18th century: Names of female Sufis from Java and Cirebon were recorded in the silsilah of the Shattariyah order.

18th–19th centuries: The flowering of Sufi literary productions in many Southeast Asian vernacular languages, especially in Bugis, Tausug, Minang, Makassarese, Sundanese, Sasak, and Acehnese dialects. The works were usually written in the Arabic script.

1750s–1800s: Muhammad Arshad Al-Banjari from South Kalimantan attacked the corrupting influences of the martabat tujuh and wahdatul wujud ideologies.

1807–1837: Sufis, known as the Padris, returned to West Sumatra from their studies in Makkah and campaigned for aggressive reforms against local customs and esoteric Sufism.

1825–1830: Sufi prince of the Yogyakarta court, Diponegoro, waged war against the Dutch and their collaborators. These years saw the intensification of Sufi resistance against colonialism in Southern Thailand and Southern Philippines.

1820s–1890s: Founding of hundreds of pondoks and pesantren across Southeast Asia in reaction to Siamese and European intervention into Muslim affairs.

1850s–1870s: Raja Ali Haji a prominent member of the Naqshbandiyyah tariqah in Riau wrote influential poems to attract the masses to Sufism and ethical conduct.

1869: The opening of Suez Canal and invention of steamships heighten contacts between Sufis in Southeast Asia and their brethren across the Indian Ocean. This period saw increased influence of Arab Hadramis in Southeast Asian Sufism and other reform movements.

1890: Habib Nuh mausoleum was constructed in Singapore. It became a site visited by Muslims and non-Muslims.

1890–1913: Moros in the Philippines fought wars against the United States, claiming thousands of lives on both ends.

1905: Al-Imam journal which was modelled on the Egyptian periodical, Al-Manar, was published. Seeds of reformist ideas were planted in the minds of many Sufi orders despite resistance by the conservative ulama.

1907: The founding of Madrasah Al-Iqbal by Syed Shaikh al-Hadi ushered modernist reforms in the running of Islamic educational institutions.

1926: Sufi-led Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was created as a rival to the modernist Muhammadiyah movement established more than a decade earlier.