

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i2.611>

## Challenges of Spiritual Cosmology: Symbolism in Esoteric Texts in Indonesia

Muhammad Abdullah<sup>1</sup>, Moh. Muzakka<sup>2</sup>, R. Siti Rukayah<sup>3</sup>, Onok Yayang Pamungkas<sup>4</sup>,

### Abstract

*Esoteric aspects in the pesantren tradition such as wirid, hizb, wifiq, and rajah are still often marginalized in academic studies, trapped in stigma as mystical artifacts or even misunderstood. This research aims to deconstruct this academic marginalization and examine the metaphysical and ethnological dimensions and esoteric texts of Islamic boarding schools, revealing its role in building a spiritual dialectic that integrates Islamic theology with local wisdom. The research method used is a philological approach, which includes inventory, description, transliteration, translation, and manuscript identification. In addition, focus group discussions (FGD) were implemented to enrich textual analysis and explore the meanings contained in the cultural context of Islamic boarding schools. The results of the study show that wirid and hizb, with a certain repetitive and kaifiyah structure, not only function as ritualistic means, but also as a transcendental gateway to the presence of the Divine. Wifiq and diagrams, with their intricate symbolic and numerical configurations, reflect a cosmological order that confirms man's connection to greater spiritual power. This research underlines that the esoteric texts of pesantren act as an epistemic device that unites the world of transitory materials, offering spiritual insights that remain relevant in the modern era. The implications of this study encourage interdisciplinary studies that integrate Islamic studies, anthropology, and philosophy, while opening up space for comparative exploration with global esoteric traditions to enrich understanding of human spiritual complexity.*

**Keywords:** spiritual epistemology, pesantren esotericism, Islamic cosmology, symbolic ritual, cultural metaphysics

### Introduction

In the intellectual landscape of Islam in Indonesia, pesantren stand as cultural fortresses that store spiritual and intellectual treasures, rooted in classical books by salaf scholars. The scientific foundation of pesantren is built on classical literature covering various Islamic disciplines, such as fiqh, tafsir, hadith, kalam, and tasawwuf. These works of the salaf scholars not only serve as learning materials, but also form the epistemological framework underlying the education and thought system in pesantren. Through the teaching and study of these classical texts, pesantren succeeded in building a strong and sustainable intellectual network, which has lasted for centuries (Brakel, 2004; Pamungkas dkk., 2023; Salim, 2013). Through these texts, pesantren build a dynamic intellectual network, as built by monumental figures such as Sheikh Abdus Samad Al-Palembani to Imam Nawawi Al-Bantani. The uniqueness of pesantren lies in their ability to adapt Islamic teachings to the local Indonesian context, especially Javanese culture. Their teaching traditions embrace an inclusive and cultural approach, in line with the policies of the Wali Songo

<sup>1</sup> Indonesian Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Diponegoro University, Indonesia. Corresponding authors: [mabdullah.undip@gmail.com](mailto:mabdullah.undip@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> Indonesian Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Diponegoro University, Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup> Architecture Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Diponegoro University, Indonesia.

<sup>4</sup> Indonesian Language and Literature Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto, Purwokerto, Indonesia.



who integrated Islam into the fabric of Javanese society through accommodative and eclectic methods (Hermawan & Pradita, 2020; Pamungkas dkk., 2024; Pradita dkk., 2020). With the idea that Islam is not just a religious institution, but also a catalyst for socialization and cultural change, the harmonization of Islam with local wisdom needs to be done in ontological unity. Therefore, pesantren not only function as religious educational institutions, but also as effective agents of social and cultural change, promoting the integration of Islam into the fabric of Indonesian society in a peaceful and sustainable manner.

However, despite this significance, esoteric aspects of pesantren traditions, such as wirid, hizb, and wifiq, are still trapped in epistemological blindness in the academic world. These types of texts, although based on spiritual teachings derived from the prayers of the Prophet Muhammad, are often marginalized and reduced to mystical artifacts or even shamanic stigmas (Mulder, 2001; Pamungkas dkk., 2024; Sartini et al., 2016). The lack of scholarly attention to these works reinforces the widening knowledge gap, creating a paradox between the religious traditions of pesantren and the scientific narratives that ignore them. This phenomenon indicates an imbalance in the understanding and appreciation of the intellectual and spiritual wealth contained in the pesantren tradition. In fact, the texts are not only incarnated as ritualistic devices, but also hold anthropological riches that reflect the dialectical relationship between humans, religion, and culture (Arshad & Masood, 2019; Kasanova dkk., 2024; Kopytowska et al., 2022). The diagrams and wifiq in these texts contain philosophical meanings that link local belief systems with Islamic cosmology. In these powerful symbolic narratives, magical and religious elements are inextricably intertwined, creating a unique synthesis that deserves deeper academic attention and study. The neglect of these aspects is not only detrimental to our understanding of the pesantren tradition, but also limits our insight into the complexity and richness of Islamic culture in Indonesia.

For this reason, this study aims to deconstruct the academic marginalization of esoteric texts in pesantren. The focus of the research is the metaphysical and ethnological dimensions of spiritual practices in esoteric texts. The holistic approach used aims to understand the mystification present in these texts and position them as manifestations of cultural dialectics that combine Islamic teachings with local wisdom. For, after all, esoteric traditions are a way not only to gain wisdom but also an alternative way to spiritual challenges in times of globalization (Asprem, 2017; Burn, 2014). With a holistic approach, this study seeks to investigate mystification and position these works as manifestations of cultural dialectics, which integrate Islamic theology with cultural diversity. This is because esoteric texts contain teachings that awaken human spiritual awareness. Therefore, this research is expected to provide new enlightenment that contributes to the interdisciplinary study of Islam, philosophy and local culture. The inherent hope is that these discourses will spark rich intellectual debates, encourage deep philosophical reflection, and open new horizons in understanding the interaction between religious teachings and cultural diversity as the multi-layered basis of civilization.

## Methods

This research aims to make a substantial contribution to the understanding of the classical text of the Book of Mamba'ul Hikmah (Rasyid, 1992), through a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach. The first step in this study is a focused group discussion, which is conducted collaboratively to identify research needs, which simultaneously conducts direct data analysis (Creswell, 2014; Hamilton & Finley, 2019). This process allows to explore the spiritual,

aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural aspects of the text in depth, which are relevant to the background of traditional Indonesian culture. This approach allows researchers to gain rich and diverse insights into the meaning and significance of texts in a broader cultural and historical context. After the focus group discussion, the next step is to conduct an extensive literature review (Mohajan, 2018). This stage is crucial for deepening the understanding of the text as it allows researchers to access and analyze a variety of relevant academic sources. This literature review not only broadens knowledge of the spiritual, aesthetic, and cosmological aspects of symbolism in the Islamic tradition, but also helps in identifying gaps in research, as well as positioning these studies in a more complex academic context. By combining insights based on focus group discussions and literature reviews, this study aims to provide an in-depth analysis and rich contextualization of the Book of Mamba'ul Hikmah.

In addition to adequate theoretical references, the research continues with the application of the main method, the so-called philological method. For this, the philological method involves a number of stages: inventory, description, transliteration, translation, and identification of the text (Kazarov & Petrechko, 2019; Pollock et al., 2015). The inventory is carried out systematically, because the goal is to collect all versions if the existing manuscripts are spread throughout Java, many of which have various versions that have been appreciated. The description and text gathering step implies a detailed analysis of the physical condition of the manuscript to verify its authenticity. Transliterations and translations are meticulously done to make the text accessible, but without compromising its value as a historical artifact. Furthermore, content analysis is carried out as a critical step to evaluate important aspects of the manuscript. This classification and compilation process is carried out accurately to ascertain which version of the text is the most basic and high-quality (Creswell, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As a result of a systematic and authentic philological method, this study rejuvenates the esoteric text, but also examines the spiritual and ethical values expressed within, which are then expanded on the understanding of Islamic and cultural aspects.

## **Results**

### **Classification and Description of Esoteric Manuscripts**

Esoteric texts in pesantren, such as wirid, hizb, wiqif, and rajah, are unique representations of Javanese mystical and spiritual cosmology. It reflects the close relationship between man and the Divine entity. To this end, the findings of this study show that the practice of wirid is not just a dhikr ritual, but rather a means of transcendence, where the divine presence is mediated through the repetition of sacred texts, which resonates in the soul of its practitioner. The existence of a repetitive structure and ritual discipline in wirid creates a spiritual field that makes pesantren<sup>5</sup> a center for community meditation. This discovery underscores the importance of rite elements in maintaining collective spiritual stability (Arshad & Masood, 2019; Cornish, 2024), while maintaining cultural heritage as a rite element in maintaining collective spiritual stability, while maintaining cultural heritage as a uniting element of generations. The following are the main classifications and functions of the esoteric texts of pesantren, as summarized in Table 1.

---

<sup>5</sup> Islamic boarding schools are traditional Islamic educational institutions that aim to deepen religious knowledge and practice it in daily life (S. A. Ayubi & Masruri, 2025)

**Table 1. Classification and Function of Esoteric Manuscripts in the Pesantren Tradition**

<b>Types of Manuscripts</b>	<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Shape</b>	<b>Main Functions</b>	<b>Reference Sources</b>
Wirid	Contains remembrance and routine prayers that are read in the morning and evening; aims to get closer to Allah.	Arabic or pegon text, read regularly (routine)	For a spiritual approach, asking for protection, and blessings	Hadith books and nearby teachings
Hizb	It contains ma'tsurat prayers and mustajab prayers, recited with certain kaifiyah to face great danger or enemies	Arabic texts with a special arrangement are sometimes equipped with symbols	Protection from enemies, safety, and expulsion from danger	Book of Sayyid Muhammad bin Alawi al-Maliki
Wifiq	Number symbols with Arabic letters,  Compiled with a specific formula and time for a magical purpose	Square shape (mutsalats, murabas, mukhamas)	Spell traps, self-protection, and earnings	Book Manba' usul Al-Hikmah by imam Al-Buni
Rajah	Writing on media such as paper, cloth, or leaves, is often used as a talisman	Written in Arabic kalam, equipped with Qur'anic verses	For jinn repellents, witch repellents, and magic	Book Mamba'ul Zainur Rasyid

Esoteric texts in the pesantren tradition, such as wirid, hizb, and rajah, are concrete forms and spiritual synthesis of Islam that is thick with mystical cosmology and cultural locality (Asprem, 2017; Benoist, 2004; Burns, 2014; Irfani et al., 2021). The practice of wirid as a structured dhikr ritual, is not just a prayer shown to get closer to the Divine, but becomes a gateway to transcendence where the divine presence is felt in every repetition that echoes in the depths of the soul. He affirmed the idea that words are not just linguistic symbols, but sacred vibrations that resonate with metaphysical reality, forming a spiritual path that takes humans to a dimension of serenity that transcends material consciousness (Alatas, 2020; DeWeese & Gross, 2019). Meanwhile, hizb emerged as a more complex manifestation of spiritual protection, full of prayer structures based on tariqat and sharia traditions. The reading of hizb containing this theological formula, with a certain kaifiyyah, shows that resistance to danger is not a mere magical effort, but a theological statement of the presence of a divine force that protects the faithful from destructive threats (Al Ayubi & Masruri, 2025; Irfani et al., 2021). In this context, hizb becomes an expression of consecrated resistance, formulating the sacred relationship between faith and spiritual power. Through wirid and hizb, devotees not only seek closeness to the Divine, but also find ways to affirm their spiritual identity in a broader cultural context. The figure, as the third element in the esoteric trias of pesantren, adds a visual and symbolic dimension to this spiritual practice. To this end, the use of diagrams reflects the belief in the power of symbols and scripture

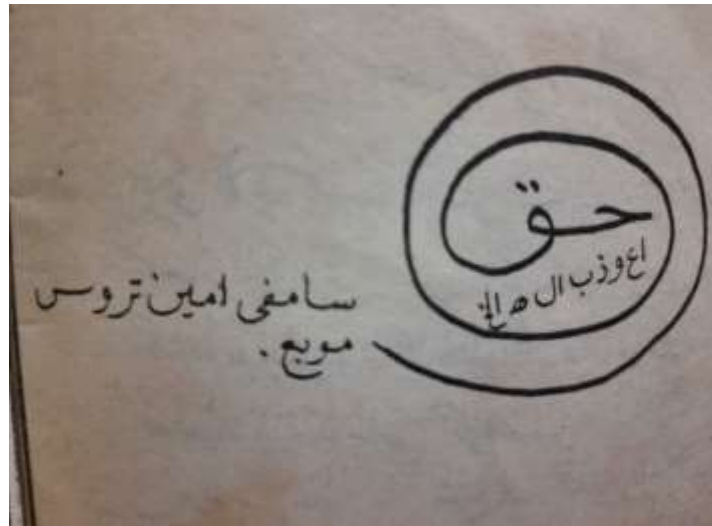
in influencing spiritual and material reality. The existence of the *rajah* also shows the flexibility of Islam in adopting and adapting elements of local culture into religious practices. Therefore, the synthesis between *wirid*, *hizb*, and *rajah* in the *pesantren* tradition not only enriches the spiritual treasures of Islam, but also serves as tangible evidence that religion can evolve and adapt to diverse socio-cultural contexts without losing its spiritual essence.

The practice of *wifiq* and diagrams expands the spiritual symbolic dimension in *pesantren* through complex numerical and symbolic constructions, which provide an understanding of the cosmological order rooted in the mystical teachings of Islam. In this study, *wifiq* is identified as a medium that metaphorically seeks to control destiny and protect practitioners from negative energies through the configuration of numbers and letters (Kholili et al., 2019; Rusli et al., 2022). The examples studied, such as the 'Wifiq of Self-Protection' arranged according to a specific astrological time, indicate a local understanding of the relationship between time, cosmic symbolism, and spiritual protection. This contribution not only enriched the understanding of symbolism in Javanese Islam, but also provided insight into magical symbols in the religious practice of *gloabal*. Meanwhile, the figure, as a magical writing created on a physical medium such as paper or cloth, displays an ontological paradox: although it appears material, it contains metaphysical energy that puts the human being in direct contact with the spiritual entity. *Rajah* manifests an esoteric wisdom that considers symbols as a medium that actualizes supernatural protection and power (Asprem, 2017; Burns, 2014), which shows how humans in the *pesantren* tradition understand and manipulate the relationship between the physical and metaphysical realms. These two texts, *wifiq* and *rajah*, are clear evidence that spiritual teachings in *pesantren* not only speak of faith on an abstract level, but also permeate into symbolic practices that bridge the visible and the invisible. Thus, the practice of *wifiq* and *rajah* in Islamic boarding schools shows the complexity of the interaction between local traditions and Islamic teachings. The use of these symbols reflects man's efforts to understand and control invisible forces, but it also raises questions about the boundaries between belief and superstition. Although this practice provides a sense of security and protection for its users, it is necessary to consider whether this is in line with the more orthodox teachings of Islam. It is also important to examine the social impact of these practices, especially in the context of an increasingly rational modern society. Finally, further studies are needed to understand how these practices are evolving and adapting in the face of the challenges of globalization and modernization.

### **The Essence of Symbolism in the *Rajah* and *Wifiq* Tradition**

In the *pesantren* tradition, the symbolism embedded in the diagram and *wifiq* shows a deep esoteric understanding of the relationship between humans, the physical realm, and Divine reality. *Rajah* and *wifiq* are not only seen as powerful magical mediums, but also as a means of communication with the universe governed by spiritual laws. Every element used in the writing of diagrams and *wifiq*, starting from *hijaiyah* letters to numerical patterns, is believed to carry divine power that can change or protect the reality of one's experience. The philosophy behind the meaning of symbolism is believed to be rooted in the idea that the world is structured cosmologically. That is, humans can take advantage of that order by crafting appropriate symbols to summon the desired spiritual power (Forth, 2022; Kholili et al., 2019). For this reason, it is important to understand that, each *hijaiyah* letter has a mystical meaning. Each letter is believed to have a *khadam* that watches over and protects humans who use it with full confidence. Examples include the *Rajah* of the Repulsion *Thuyul*, which describes sacred words arranged in a circle to create a spiritual field that cannot be penetrated by supernatural entities. This

philosophy is rooted in the Islamic cosmological view that sees the world as an order controlled by the Divine will. This figure is not just a handwritten work; it is a manifestation of the belief that sacred symbols can bring divine protection, and that the human beings who use them become part of a larger spiritual network. As an illustration, Figure 1 shows one of the examples of Rajah and Wifiq Rejection of Thuyul, which depicts a symbolic structure in the pesantren tradition.

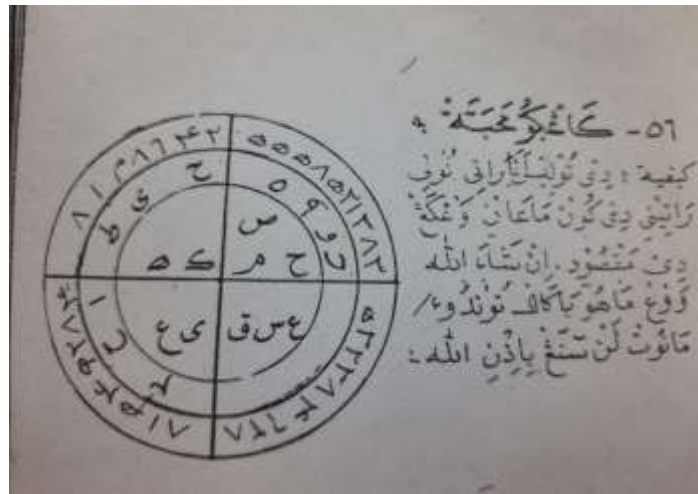


**Figure 1. Figure and Wifiq Reject Tuyul**

Figure 1 shows the configuration of the diagram with the holy words arranged in a circle. This symbol symbolizes faith in the cosmic order and divine protection. Diagrams and wifiq with numbers and letters look more complex, consisting of a combination of numbers and letters. Each dimensional configuration presents an overview of cosmology. For this, according to Asprem (2017), which is also used in the esoteric Islamic tradition, numbers and letters are not static. Rather, it shows the order of the universe that can influence the fate and destiny of humans. The use of diagrams and wifiq has various purposes, including for worship or self-protection. Its creation involves selecting the appropriate numbers and taking into account certain astrological conditions. For example, a person's worship or self-protection diagram is made with the appropriate number and evidenced by certain astrological conditions. For this reason, the combination of the image of the full moon child, which if utilized leads to the grace and full cosmic energy of the Moon. The placement of diagrams and wifiq highlights the fact that, each number and symbol has the power of a universal line (Asprem, 2017; Fourth, 2022; Kholili et al., 2019). Therefore, diagrams and wifiq serve as keys that can be used to lock or unlock the energy of certain universe lines for humans. These diagrams and wifiq represent the complexity and depth of meaning contained in them. The use of numbers and letters in certain configurations not only has symbolic significance, but is also believed to have real spiritual power. The combination of these elements creates a structure that is considered capable of bridging the physical and metaphysical worlds (Irwin, 2020; Wright, 2008; Tunç et al., 2022). The existence of diagrams and wifiq in the esoteric Islamic tradition illustrates man's efforts to understand and manipulate invisible cosmic forces. The selection of the right numbers and letters in the creation of this diagram is considered a process that requires in-depth knowledge of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. This use of diagrams and wifiq also reflects a belief



in the interconnection between various aspects of life, including spirituality, astrology, and mathematics. For this, it is illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Examples of Symbolic Figures in the Pesantren Tradition**

Figure 2 contains a pie chart divided into 4 main parts, which are explained in Arabic. This diagram is believed to contain spiritual powers, which are used for protection. Each part of the circle contains a combination of letters, numerical numbers, special prayers that are symbolically inserted into the spiritual field. Components in a Diagram are based on:

1. **Outer circle:** It is a numerical symbol that serves to strengthen metaphysical energy. These numbers often have a cosmological or astrological significance.
2. **Inside:** Text in Arabic letters means prayer or dhikr printed in the sense of asking Allah.
3. **Quadrant structure:** This is done by dividing the circle into four parts, which reflects the balance of the nature of the spiritual and physical dimensions of the human being, which refers to the cosmological order in Islam.

The purpose of this diagram is protection. The existence of the diagram shows a deep understanding of symbolism in Islamic cosmology, where writing and numbers are seen as a medium to maintain a relationship between humans and the cosmos, with spiritual power (Asprem, 2017; Fourth, 2022; Kholili et al., 2019). This tradition emphasizes that symbolism in diagrams and wafiq is the language used to communicate with the spiritual realm. He expressed the belief that the world is full of Divine signs (verses) that can be manipulated through spiritual discipline. In the pesantren tradition, the ability to understand and activate these symbols is a form of wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation, affirming how deep the connection between man and the divine is through these esoteric texts. The symbolism used suggests that magic and protection are not only mystical, but are the result of spiritual harmony between humans and the divine order that governs the universe. This diagram is a complex manifestation of the fusion of Islamic cosmology and local wisdom that has crystallized over the centuries. Its presence is not just a visual artifact, but an epistemological window that opens the horizons of our understanding of the interconnection between the visible universe and transcendental reality. The symbolism woven into each curve and line of this diagram is an

esoteric language that articulates the harmony between the human microcosm and the divine macrocosm (Aderibigbe, 2022; Costache & Lewis, 2024; Munitz, 2014). The conceptual sophistication contained in it reflects the depth of spirituality and intellect of its creators and users, who are able to collaborate elements of numerology, calligraphy, and sacred geometry into a magical synthesis that functions as a medium of protection as well as a means of contemplation. This diagram, as such, serves not only as a talismanic object, but also as a visual representation of a worldview that views reality as a holistic whole, where each element has a deep cosmic resonance and spiritual significance.

### **Rituals and practices of Asceticism in the Islamic Boarding School Tradition**

The diagram and its formative relationship to wifiq serve as examples of ascetic spiritual practices, which are fundamental in the pesantren tradition. He emphasized the importance of internal revenue to achieve maximum protection. The authors argue that practices such as fasting and inhaling agarwood not only act as a physical system, but also act as a vehicle for practitioners to create an energy balance between the physical and spiritual. By taking an interdisciplinary lens, this study shows that, asceticism in the pesantren tradition reflects religious practices in various esoteric traditions from around the world. It also emphasizes that the value of pesantren in comparative cultural studies is the implementation of mystical exercises in different traditions. In this study, common ascetic practices include fasting, intense dhikr, and life agarwood, all to facilitate self-purification and carry oneself for the purpose of aligning with the environment, while also being in harmony with the cosmos. At the esoteric level (Asprem, 2017; Benoist, 2004; Burns, 2014), says that fasting is becoming a more sacred channel through which written signs (material signs in general) can have an effect on the improvement of human spirituality. The practice of asceticism in the pesantren tradition not only focuses on the physical aspect, but also involves a deep spiritual dimension. Through rituals such as fasting and dhikr, practitioners seek to achieve a higher state of consciousness and a stronger connection with the universe. The use of agarwood in spiritual practice shows the importance of natural elements in achieving energy balance and self-purification. A comparative study of ascetic practices in Islamic boarding schools with other esoteric traditions opens up new insights into the universality of human spiritual experience. The research also highlights how material symbols and signs, as seen in the wifiq diagram, can serve as a bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds, enriching our understanding of the complex interactions between body, mind, and soul in religious practice. The findings on this are shown in table 2.

**Table 2. Details of Esoteric Rituals in the Pesantren Tradition**

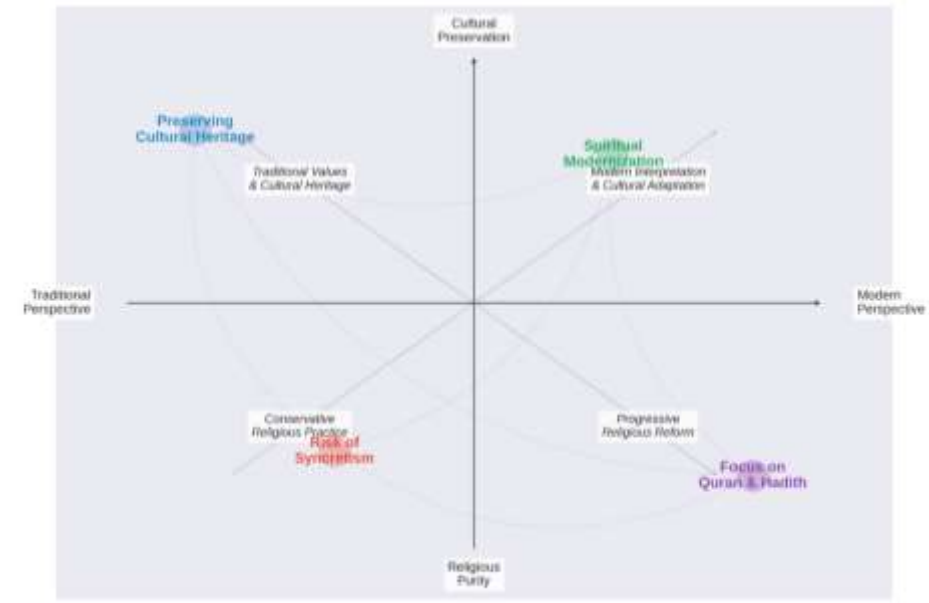
<b>Ritual</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Spiritual goals</b>
Fast	Not eating, drinking, or sleeping for 1-3 days, starting on a specific day	Purify body and soul, strengthen intention, and create connection with divine energy
Intensive dhikr	Recitation of certain verses repeatedly Usually done at night	Activating the spiritual power of rajah/wafiq and presenting divine protection
Agarwood fumigation	Burning agarwood during prayer reading, creating a sacred aroma	Creating a harmonious spiritual environment, paving the way for cosmic energy



Table 2 provides a summary of the rituals of the spiritual process in this tradition. Dhikr that is done on a certain day is a practice that is designed to activate the spiritual energy of the *rajah* or *wafiq*. This dhikr is repeated solemnly, creating a spiritual vibration that is believed to strengthen the desired protection or blessing. Every recitation, such as *ta'awudz* or Surah Al-Fatihah, is treated as a sacred frequency that connects humans to the supernatural. In this framework, dhikr is not a verbal activity, but a tool that builds a strong spiritual energy field around the practitioner (Asprem, 2017; Burns, 2014). Meanwhile, the smoking of agarwood, which is done during the recitation of prayers or when the *rajah/wafiq* is activated, adds a sacral element to the ritual process. Agarwood, with its fragrant aroma, is believed to pave the way in cosmic forces to be present and blend with the surrounding environment. Agarwood smoke creates a sacred atmosphere and supports meditative conditions. It is a spiritual experience that connects the physical world with the metaphysical realm (Bakansing et al., 2019; Kalita et al., 2020). This ritual emphasizes that spirituality in the *pesantren* tradition is highly dependent on self-control and individual discipline. This is because the human body is treated as a medium that must be strictly prepared to receive energy from the divine. Therefore, this ascetic practice echoes the teachings of Sufism, which views the human body as a vessel in which one can prepare oneself to reach a spiritual level. In this tradition, all forms of physical comfort are sacrificed for the sake of spiritual blessings, which can only be achieved through sincerity and sacrifice.

## Discussion

In today's modern era, the tradition of *rajah* and *wafiq* continues to spark deep debate and contemplation, both among theologians, academics, and the general public. On the one hand, the existence of esoteric texts is considered a spiritual heritage that must be preserved, while on the other hand, they are criticized for being irrelevant to the more textual and rational modern Islam (Asprem, 2017; Pamungkas et al., 2023). For this reason, the relevance of this tradition lies in its ability to offer a sense of security in the midst of the uncertainty of an increasingly complex world. However, these practices are often questioned by those who consider that the use of symbolism and amulets, such as *rajah* and *wafiq*, has the potential to deviate from Islamic principles. Meanwhile, supporters of this tradition argue that *rajah* and *wafiq* are forms of esoteric wisdom that combine Islamic theology with local wisdom, which has been tested for centuries in maintaining community harmony (Asprem, 2017; Muttakin, 2012). They emphasized that the use of *rajah* and *wafiq* is based on pure intentions carried out with disciplined rituals, which actually strengthens the relationship with Allah. In this context, *rajah* and *wafiq* are seen as tools that help humans live submission and dependence on Almighty God, while affirming that protection and blessings are completely the will of Allah. However, on the other hand, there is sharp criticism that comes from scholars and academics who adhere to a more puritanical view of Islam (Mulder, 2001; Salim, 2013). They highlighted the potential deviation of the *aqidah* that occurs if *rajah* and *wafiq* are considered as independent sources of power that are separate from the oneness of Allah. This view emphasizes that reliance on magical symbols can lead to the practice of *shirk*, especially if belief in *rajah* and *wafiq* is stronger than belief in Allah. In this view, *rajah* and *wafiq* must be viewed carefully, and their validity must be tested through the lens of pure Islamic teachings. For this, Figure 4 provides an illustration of the dynamics of views divided into four quadrants in response to the relevance of traditional spirituality in the modern era.



**Figure 4. Map of Views on the Relevance of Traditional Spirituality**

Caption:

This graph features four quadrants depicting:

- Upper left quadrant: Preserving Cultural Heritage (blue), representing views in favor of preserving traditions;
- Lower Left Quadrant: Risk of syncretism (red), indicating concern about mixing beliefs;
- Upper Right Quadrant: Spiritual Modernization (green), describing efforts to adapt to modern times;
- Bottom Right Quadrant: Focus on the Quran & hadith (purple), emphasizing back to the main source.

In Figure 3, there is a subtle, yet intense clash between the modern tradition, between the sacred and the profane. It creates significant tensions in the contemporary cultural and spiritual landscape. This phenomenon goes beyond just a feud of surface values. It is a dialectic that animates a space where the past and the present test and confirm each other, forming a dynamic relationship between the old and the new. Rajah and wafiq stand as markers of ancestral wisdom, which walk at the crossroads of time. This is because diagrams and wafiq are not only mystical symbols, but they are witnesses to the struggle of humans in understanding supernatural existence, through texts that represent the cosmos (Forth, 2022; Kholili et al., 2019). Their presence at this crossroads is not only a symbol of the resilience of tradition, but also a reflection of the quest for timeless relevance. This proves that, true cultural identity is not the result of the freezing of meaning, but of continuous adaptation and transformation (Kopytowska et al., 2022;

Perry, 2017). Thus, the tension between the values of the traditional cosmos and the demands of the modern world can be mediated. In addition, this is done not only to preserve the deepest cultural values, but also to reflect the capacity of the tradition to retain its essence while adapting to the changing times.

Rajah and wafiq, in this context, are not just relics of the past that deserve to be preserved, but living entities that are actively in dialogue with contemporary values, as if present to unite dualities that are often considered irreconcilable. In this dialectical space, tradition should not be considered static, but contains the potential for transformation and regeneration, making cultural heritage more than just an object to be preserved. It becomes a dynamic organism, which responds to the needs of the times and adapts without leaving the noble values that are its roots (Fuchs, 2015; Motts, 2022; Pamungkas et al., 2024). Traditions that are maintained in a rigid form cause alienation, locking themselves into a form that is no longer able to communicate with the times. On the other hand, blind moderation will lose spiritual meaning, creating a void in man's quest for meaning. This tension, therefore, is not something to be resolved, but a creative energy that revives spiritual values and the meaning of life. In this vortex of paradox, the more individuals try to question tradition in its pure form, the more we encourage it to evolve, discovering new forms and meanings. The highest wisdom is to embrace this tension as a means of digging deeper meaning. Therefore, rajah and wafiq, as a manifestation of the living cultural soul, reflect the complexity of the eternal struggle between the past and the present. This is a struggle that does not seek an end, but instead brings meaning to the tension that is the basis for the preservation of authentic traditions.

## **Conclusion**

Through these texts, pesantren initiate students and expand the pesantren's worldview of Islam. Therefore, this study shows that esoteric manuscripts of pesantren traditions, such as wirid, hizb, wafiq, and rajah, are not only ritualistic tools that can be understood paradoxically. The symbols created by these texts collapse into a cosmological image that mediates between man and transcendent dimensions. This development enriched Javanese Islamic thought, while offering a rich tradition of spiritual uniqueness. In the context of pesantren, these texts manifest not only as ritual tools, but also metaphysical symbols that unite the material world and the supernatural world. With a complex system of symbolism, including numerical patterns, sacred scripts, and cosmic structures present in wirid and wafiq, these phase texts create a broad, meaningful, and deeply spiritual dialect. Therefore, this tradition places pesantren as a locus of continuous enrichment, both spirituality and Islamic rituals. Such epistemological artifacts make pesantren well positioned under today's modernity that ignores the value of tradition. However, this still remains existential. Despite the depth of their philosophy, esoteric texts are far from artifacts frozen in time. However, esoteric texts show adaptability to modernity. Esoteric texts are in dialogue with time, which in turn provides a rich spiritual tradition for those living in our complicated world. Therefore, pesantren has strengthened its position as a fortress of spirituality that still survives, while continuing to transform to answer today's challenges.

The significance of the implications of this study is the expansion of understanding of the dynamics of Islamic esoterist practices that are rooted in the reality of local culture and spiritual wisdom. This research strengthens the academic foundation for a cross-disciplinary approach that includes not only theological aspects, but also anthropological and philosophical. The esoteric tradition of pesantren must be seen as more than just a cultural heritage that deserves to be

preserved. It is a dynamic medium that continues to live and reinterpret the relationship between humans and the divine, even in the midst of accelerating changes in global civilization. This tradition plays an important role in maintaining spiritual balance, presenting a model of sustainability of noble values that persists in the midst of moderation. However, this study recognizes that there are limitations in the coverage of variant texts and very diverse practices in the Indonesian pesantren landscape. For this reason, further research is expected to expand exploration, including various other esoteric texts by utilizing a comparative approach, on the study of similar spiritual traditions in other parts of the world. This approach will open up a more global perspective, to uncover the interconnectedness of cross-cultural symbolism that reflects the spiritual complexity of humans. By tracing these esoteric symbols, the pesantren tradition can be recognized as part of a living spiritual network, connecting the past with the present, and continuing to dialogue with the times.

### **Acknowledgments**

Thank you to the Universitas Diponegoro for fully supporting this research.

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships, which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### **Authors' contributions**

All authors contributed equally to this work.

### **Ethical consideration**

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from Universitas Diponegoro (clearance number: 3137/UN27.02/ DP/2024).

### **Funding information**

The Universitas Diponegoro funded this research.

### **Data availability statement**

Data sharing does not apply to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

### **Disclaimer**

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

### **References**

- Aderibigbe, I. S. (2022). Cosmological and Ontological Beliefs. In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion* (pp. 131–141). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89500-6\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89500-6_9)
- Al Ayubi, S., & Masruri, M. (2025). Ritual learning method for mystical ijazah at pondok pesantren salafiyah. *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)*, 19(1), 314–321.
- Alatas, I. F. (2020). Dreaming saints: exploratory authority and Islamic praxes of history in Central Java. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 26(1), 67–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13177>
- Arshad, M. R., & Masood, F. B. (2019). Discourse on the significance of rituals in religious socialization. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 9(2), 194–211. <https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.92.10>
- Asprem, E. (2017). Explaining the esoteric imagination: Towards a theory of kataphatic practice. *Aries*,

- Ayubi, S. A., & Masruri, M. (2025). Ritual learning method for mystical ijazah at pondok pesantren salafiyah. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 19(1), 314–321. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v19i1.21090>
- Bakansing, S. M., Sahri, M. H., & Liew, K. C. (2019). Uses of Agarwood. In *Prospects and Utilization of Tropical Plantation Trees*. CRC Press.
- Benoist, L. (2004). *The Esoteric Path: An Introduction to the Hermetic Tradition*. Sophia Perennis.
- Brakel, L. F. (2004). Islam and local traditions: Syncretic ideas and practices. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 32(92), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1363981042000263435>
- Burns, D. M. (2014). Ancient esoteric traditions: Mystery, revelation, gnosis. In *The Occult World* (pp. 17–33). Routledge.
- Cornish, H. (2024). Musicking and Soundscapes amongst Magical-Religious Witches: Community and Ritual Practices. *Religions*, 15(1), 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010071>
- Costache, D., & Lewis, G. F. (2024). A New Copernican Turn: Contemporary Cosmology, the Self, and Orthodox Science-Engaged Theology. In *A New Copernican Turn: Contemporary Cosmology, the Self, and Orthodox Science-Engaged Theology*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003527138>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- DeWeese, D., & Gross, J.-A. (2019). Sufism in Central Asia: New Perspectives on Sufi Traditions, 15th–21st Centuries. In *Handbook of Oriental Studies* (pp. 721–721). Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047407614\\_023](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047407614_023)
- Forth, G. (2022). Mountain Turtles and Giant Crabs: Cosmological Implications and Supernatural Understandings of Rare Creatures on an Eastern Indonesian Island. *Anthrozoos*, 35(4), 495–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2021.2012338>
- Fuchs, M. (2015). Processes of religious individualisation: stocktaking and issues for the future. *Religion*, 45(3), 330–343. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2015.1024035>
- Hamilton, A. B., & Finley, E. P. (2019). Qualitative methods in implementation research: An introduction. *Psychiatry Research*, 280, 112516.
- Hermawan, W., & Pradita, L. E. (2020). Adzan pitu? Syncretism or religious tradition: Research in sang cipta rasa Cirebon mosque. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 76(3), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.5283>
- Irfani, F., Albantani, A. M., Suhendra, A., & Masnin, H. (2021). The Other Sides of Pesantren: Magical Practices Around Pesantren in Banten. *Akademika: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam*, 26(2), 311–324.
- Irwin, L. (2020). Supernal dreaming: On myth and metaphysics. *Religions*, 11(11), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11110552>
- Kalita, P., Roy, P. K., & Sen, S. (2020). Agarwood: Medicinal side of the fragrant plant. In *Herbal Medicine in India: Indigenous Knowledge, Practice, Innovation and its Value* (pp. 223–236). Springer.
- Kasanova, R., Andayani, A., & Wardani, N. E. (2024). Madurese Mantras as Local Wisdom, Spiritual Values, and Outlook on Life: An Ethnolinguistic Study. *International Journal of Society, Culture and Language*, 12(1), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2023.2011293.3163>
- Kazarov, S., & Petrechko, O. (2019). Philological and Historical Research Methods of Classical Studies. *Skhidnoievropeiskiy Istorychniy Visnyk*, 3(13), 8–15.
- Kholili, M. A., Rizali, N., & Budi, S. (2019). Amulet Development: Wifiq" Darkah Ya Ahlal Medina" from Magical Content to Visual Performance. *SEWORD FRESSH 2019: Proceedings of the 1st Seminar and Workshop on Research Design, for Education, Social Science, Arts, and Humanities, SEWORD FRESSH 2019, April 27 2019, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia*, 341.

- Kopytowska, M., Galkowski, A., & Leone, M. (2022). Thought-Sign-Symbol: Cross-Cultural representations of religion. In *Thought-Sign-Symbol: Cross-Cultural Representations of Religion*. Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b19947>
- Mohajan, H. K. (2018). Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 7(1), 23–48.
- Motts, Z. S. (2022). Sociology of Religion: Overview and Analysis of Contemporary Religion. *Religion*, 52(4), 655–658. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721x.2022.2102862>
- Mulder, N. (2001). Mistisisme Jawa. LKiS.
- Munitz, M. K. (2014). The Logic of Cosmology. *The Philosophical Review*, 28(4), 34–50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2178197>
- Muttakin, A. (2012). Islam and the Changing Meaning of Spiritualitas and Spiritual in Contemporary Indonesia. *Al-Jami`ah*, 50(2005), 23–56.
- Pamungkas, O. Y., Hastangka, H., Raharjo, S. B., Sudigdo, A., & Agung, I. (2023). The spirit of Islam in Javanese mantra: Syncretism and education. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 79(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8407>
- Pamungkas, O. Y., Zuhrah, F., Purwoko, D., & Masjid, A. Al. (2024). Exploring the Cultural Significance of Javanese Literature: A Study of Mantras. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 12(2), 138–149. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2024.2025848.3440>
- Perry, M. S. (2017). Feasting on Culture and Identity : Food Functions in a Multicultural and Transcultural Malaysia. 3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 23(4), 184–199.
- Pollock, S., Elman, B. A., & Chang, K. K. (2015). *World philology*. Harvard University Press.
- Pradita, L. E., Sumarlam, S., Saddhono, K., Rohmadi, M., & Maret, S. (2020). Martabat Tembung Wali of Sunan Gunung Jati: As the value of religious humanism for the people of Cirebon. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 76(3), 1–5. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.6202>
- Rasyid, A. Z. (1992). *Mamba’ul Hikmah. Ma’had Al Islami Nurul Huda*.
- Rusli, R., Abdussakir, A., & Furaida, A. (2022). Adam and Eve’s wifq: from mathematics to transformation practice.
- Salim, A. (2013). Javanese religion, Islam or syncretism: Comparing Woodward’s Islam in Java and Beatty’s Varieties of Javanese Religion. *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, 3(2), 223–266. <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v3i2.223-266>
- Sartini, Ahimsa-Putra, S. H., & Al-Makin. (2016). A Preliminary Survey on Islamic Mysticism in Java. *Analisis*, 16(2), 1–40.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507600314007>
- Tunç, Ş., Oğlak, S. C., Göklü, M. R., & Özköse, Z. G. (2022). Maternal mortality cases due to COVID-19 pandemic in a tertiary referral hospital. *Perinatal Journal*, 30(2), 185-194.
- Wright, M. R. (2008). Presocratic Cosmologies. In P. Curd & D. W. Graham (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/https://philpapers.org/go.pl?id=WRIPC&proxyId=&u=http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.1093%2Foxfordhb%2F9780195146875.003.0016>