

## **The Impact of Sino-Javanese Muslim Migration on Gresik's Visual Culture**

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the historical topic of the immigration of Chinese Muslims to Indonesia, which holds significance for artists, cultural scholars, historians, migration specialists and scholars of international relations. It sheds light on how the Chinese Muslim migration altered and transformed the artistic practices and institutions of the Javanese community in Gresik. This article presents a historical and textual analysis of the development of Islamic-Chinese-Javanese culture in Gresik. Verbal and visual data are collected and analyzed using Max Weber's Verstehen ethical approach to thoroughly interpret and understand the social facts. The paper demonstrates that visual culture in Gresik, such as Damar Kurung lanterns and Qur'an manuscripts, represent manifestations of Sino-Javanese Muslim culture. The historical journey of Chinese immigrants and its impact on socio-cultural aspects demonstrate that the Chinese in Indonesia are not 'newcomers' or 'foreigners', but an integral part of the Republic of Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** Chinese, Gresik, Migration, Sino-Javanese Muslim, Visual Culture.

### **Introduction**

“The Chinese people's greatest gift to Indonesia was the Islamic religion”.

This statement was delivered by BJ Habibie (third President of the Republic of Indonesia) in an oration at the Lautze Mosque in Pasar Baru, Central Jakarta on Friday, 29 August 2013 (Sasongko, 2013). BJ Habibie did not state this carelessly, he offered a spirit of historical deconstruction to dispel stereotypes and prejudice against groups of Chinese descent, which have long existed in Indonesian society. This was caused by Sinophobia (phobia towards ethnic Chinese) which was created by President Soeharto through the publication of Presidential Instruction No. 14 dated 6 December 1967 to the Minister of Religion, the Minister of Home Affairs, as well as all government agencies and instruments, from central to regional, to implement basic policies regarding Chinese religion, beliefs and customs (Raditya, 2018). Soeharto said that the manifestation of Chinese religion, beliefs and customs centered on his ancestral country (Beijing) could have an unnatural psychological, mental and moral influence on Indonesian citizens (Sai

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& Hoon, 2013). The New Order's anti-Communist policies, which were initially aimed at Beijing, were the main cause of the nation's disproportionate historical representation of Chinese (Peranakan) people in Indonesia's national historical narrative. The Suharto regime, hostile to Beijing, ignored the importance of Chinese history, resulting in the exclusion of people of Chinese descent from Indonesian historical discourse. The peak occurred in violence and sexual harassment targeting the Chinese community in Indonesia in 1965 and May 1998. In fact, based on historical evidence, ethnic Chinese have lived in Indonesia for centuries and have become part of Indonesian society, just like people of Arab descent and the Middle East, or India. There are quite a few Chinese Peranakan figures (from the Majapahit era until the birth of the Republic of Indonesia) who took part in the struggle to form identity and realize the sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia.

The statement made by BJ Habibie regarding the role of Chinese immigrants in the process of Islamization of Indonesia in the pre-modern era has been written by several researchers, and the results of this writing were even banned by the New Order government because they were considered to be disturbing national stability. In this case, immigrants/migrants have the meaning of people who choose to move not because of a direct threat of persecution, but to improve their lives by looking for work (Tewolde, 2020). In 1968, historian Slamet Muljana wrote his doctoral dissertation entitled “Runtuhnya Kerajaan Hindu Djawa dan Timbulnya Negara-Negara Islam di Nusantara” (The downfall of Hindu-Javanese kingdom and the rise of Islamic states in Indonesia) which formulated the hypothesis that historically the spread of Islam in Java was practiced by people/scholars from China. In agreement with Muljana, in 2003 Sumanto Al Qurtuby also wrote something similar: through a historical approach, both textual and oral, Qurtuby explored the role of Chinese traders in spreading Islam in Java in the 15th and 16th centuries. This research supports the China-Islam theory which states that the role of Chinese Muslim immigrants was very important in the Islamization process in Indonesia, especially in Java in pre-modern times. Instead of promoting Arab and Indian theories, Muljana and Qurtuby reveal that Chinese Muslim networks contributed to the conversion of local people to Islam. These Chinese Muslim figures collaborated with several prominent preachers known as wali songo (nine Islamic scholars who played a major role in the spread of Islam in Java) (Anita, 2014). Using a variety of sources such as diaries of European and Arab travelers, Chinese sources, local chronicles, and local stories, Qurtuby shows what he calls Muslim Sino-Javanese culture in the 15th and 16th centuries and its impact on Islamization of Java, as well as showing evidence of its legacy. Other evidence also comes from local and oral traditions collected in babad (Javanese chronicles) at the end of the 16th century and the first decades of the 17th century which describe the condition of the Javanese Muslim community on the north coast who made their living as traders. The Javanese chronicles include: Babad Tanah Jawi, Serat Kandha Ringgit Purwa, Carita (History) Lasem, Babad Cerbon, and Hikayat Hasanuddin (Fanani & Kahfi, 2019). The presence of Chinese Muslims in Java, especially in the pre-colonial period (before the 1600s), was not only written about in local records and Javanese oral traditions, but was also acknowledged by early travelers such as Tom Pires (Portuguese), Ma Huan (Chinese), Edmund Scott (England), Cornelis de Houtman (Netherlands), Ibn Battuta (Maghrib) and John Jourdan (who visited Banten in 1674). Tom Pires said that the Javanese used to have a close relationship with the Chinese and that the religion of Muhammad (Islam) was widespread among the population on the north coast of Java which consisted of Chinese, Arabs, Gujaratis, Bengalis and other nations (Cortês, 2017). This Portuguese traveler witnessed the harmony of Chinese immigrants and Javanese people in the pre-Dutch colonial period.

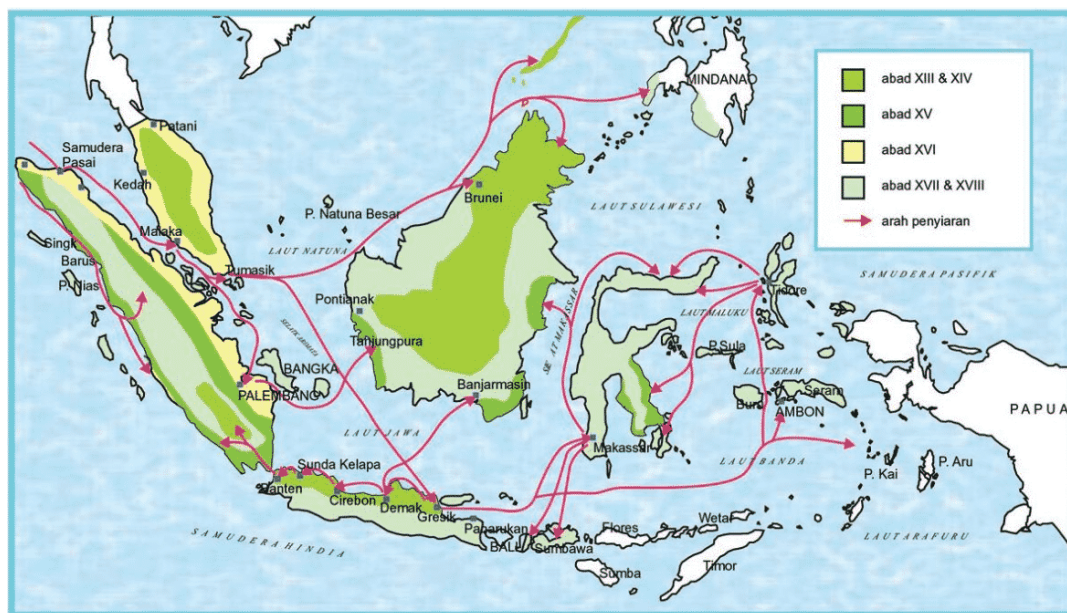


Figure 1. A map of the spread of Islam in Indonesia

(source: <https://www.dosenpendidikan.co.id/penyebaran-islam-di-indonesia/>)

Port cities along the north coast of Java Island (see Fig. 1) include Gresik (Ce-cun), Tuban (Tu-fan), Surabaya (SuJu-mai), Lasem (Lao Sam), Semarang (Toa-lang), and Jepara (Ju Mara) was originally the territory of the Majapahit Kingdom: a Hindu-Buddhist kingdom that has survived for more than three hundred years (Kurniawan, 2017). However, since the 14th century, when Islamic influence increasingly dominated, these areas were controlled by the Demak Kingdom under the leadership of Raden Patah (who was a Chinese Muslim named Jimbun) (Berg, 1955). Among these places, Gresik was the most important port during and before the existence of the Majapahit Kingdom. Gresik, located in East Java, was used by King Darmawangsa of Daha as a barracks for the royal navy long before the Majapahit Kingdom existed, and in the eleventh century, King Erlangga used this place as a garrison for military purposes and as a port for trade with Java, Bali, Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Sulawesi (Qurtuby, 2009). As time went by, immigrants from China stopped by Gresik and turned it into an international port. At that time there was a Chinese Muslim historical figure named Nyai Gede Pinatih whose real name was Shih Ta Niang Pi Na Ti, a rich woman who became the adoptive mother of Sunan Giri: one of the important figures among the wali songo (nine Muslim saints in Java) who played an important role in the spread of Islam on the island of Java) as well as the founder of the Giri palace (Giri Kedaton) in Gresik, East Java, which in the 15th to 17th centuries was a Chinese Town (Wain, 2017). The birth of Gresik as a trading city was due to Gresik's strategic position. As a port city, Gresik is supported by its strategic position geographically on the north coast of the Java Sea which is the main shipping route for domestic and international trade. The geological conditions and land structure on the Gresik coast are mostly rocky, ensuring that there is no silting process on the shore, making it easier for merchant ships to come to anchor. Gresik as a regional trade system node connects the interior of Java Island with outside Java. The Bengawan Solo River is used as a river transportation route carrying goods produced from the interior of Central Java (Government of Gresik District Level II, 1991). On the east side there is a tributary of the Brantas River which is used as a river transportation route connecting the inland areas of East Java with Gresik. From here the commodity exchange process was born. Inland commodities flow via river transportation routes towards the coast where they will then be exchanged for other commodities from outside Java. This geographical factor is what encourages the people of Gresik to work as traders, craftsmen and fishermen. The condition of the Gresik coast allows quite large ships to moor, thereby

facilitating the growth of Gresik as a busy trading port city (Hall, 1985). Moreover, the geological characteristics of Gresik, which have limestone rocks, are not suitable for agricultural land. So the people of Gresik tend to rely on industry and trade for their livelihoods, rather than as farmers.

The geographical and ecological development of Gresik, of course, has had an impact on its socio-cultural development. Several royal central cities and port cities that are equivalent to the port of Gresik include Samudera Pasai, Aceh, Malacca, Demak, Banten, Jepara, Surabaya, Ternate, Banda, Gowa-Makassar, Banjarmasin and Palembang (Mustakim, 2019). These ports are visited by many large and small traders from various foreign countries and also from kingdoms in the archipelago. Many traders from various regions stayed for some time in the port area to wait for good winds to return to sailing. In fact, these foreign traders created overseas villages in areas close to the port. The implication of these traders' activities is that port cities have specific villages according to ethnicity based on the approval of the port authority/harbourmaster. There are times when a market is formed in the village on a smaller scale than the main market at the main port. A busy port allows various meetings to take place which have an impact on the exchange of information and technology, including in terms of arts and culture.

The fact of the existence of Chinese Muslims in Java in pre-modern times is the result of long relations between Java and China that have lasted for centuries. Every long-standing racial and cultural interaction opens up opportunities for immigrants and local people to negotiate their identities (Lin & Sung, 2020). This long-standing relationship has resulted in a derivative culture that combines various elements of the original culture. This is what is meant by Sino-Javanese Muslim culture: a cultural combination of Chinese, Islamic and Javanese that spread along the north coast of Java Island from West Java to East Java (coastal) (Qurtuby, 2009). A number of artifacts and archaeological remains show a strong influence from the Chinese, such as mosque architecture, temple architecture, calligraphy, interior elements, crafts, sculpture, tombstones, paintings, chronicles, folklore, culinary, clothing, and so on. So, this article aims to describe the historiography of the migration process of the Sino-Javanese Muslim community to Java, especially to Gresik along with its impacts on the visual culture. This article attempts to identify the acculturation of elements of Chinese, Javanese and Islamic visual culture which met and combined to create a unique Gresik artifact, which still exists today.

## Research Methods

This article conducts a historical and textual analysis to explore the history and progression of Islamic-Chinese-Javanese culture in Gresik, with the aim of enhancing comprehension of the migration chronology of the Sino-Javanese Muslim community and its influence on local communities in Java. The data collected consists of verbal data from a literature review and visual data obtained by tracing artefacts of past heritage in Gresik. Visual data sources were obtained through literature review, collectors, observation, and documentation. The collected data was analysed using an ethical approach based on Max Weber's *Verstehen* to interpret, analyse, and comprehend the data and social facts thoroughly. The goal of this article is to bridge the gap between previous and current literature on the Sino-Javanese Muslim community's migration impact in Gresik and to comprehend the visual representations of their heritage.

## Result and Discussion

History of Chinese Culture and Islam in Java: Migration of the Sino-Javanese Muslim Community



Since the time of the Majapahit Kingdom, Gresik has been said to be one of the prototypes of an old city. Its role as a trading city began to develop since the mid-14th century, in line with the dynamics of other trading cities in the archipelago which are also connected to the world trade network. The archipelago region is the easternmost region which is used as a node for international trade, especially from European and Central Asian nations. From Maluku, trade routes crossed the Flores Strait, Java Sea, Malacca Strait, Bay of Bengal, Coromandel Coast and Malabar in India, Gujarat, Persia, and continued to Europe through other trade nodes (Zainuddin, 2010: 7). It was on this route that Gresik became a very important trade node.

Gresik as a port city has been known since the Majapahit Kingdom period because it was one of the doors to the Majapahit Kingdom as evidenced by the historical relics found, namely the Karang Bogem inscription and the Dwarapala statue, the Biluluk inscription, the Gosari site and the grave of Walisongo figure Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Widodo, 2004). During the Majapahit kingdom, Gresik was part of the kingdom's power. The inscription on the cave wall in Gosari Village, Ujungpangkah, Gresik shows ancient Javanese script written in 1298 Saka or 1376. Based on the year number, the inscription is most likely a relic of the Majapahit Kingdom (Mustakim 2017). At the beginning of the 15th century there were two trading ports that were well known regionally and internationally, namely Jaratan Harbor and Gresik Harbor. These two twin ports are located opposite each other at the mouth of the river. It is estimated that Gresik Harbor at that time was located in the present Karang Kiring Village facing the Lamong River, while Jaratan Harbor was located in Mengare Village, facing the Bengawan Solo Lawas River (Mustakim 2005).

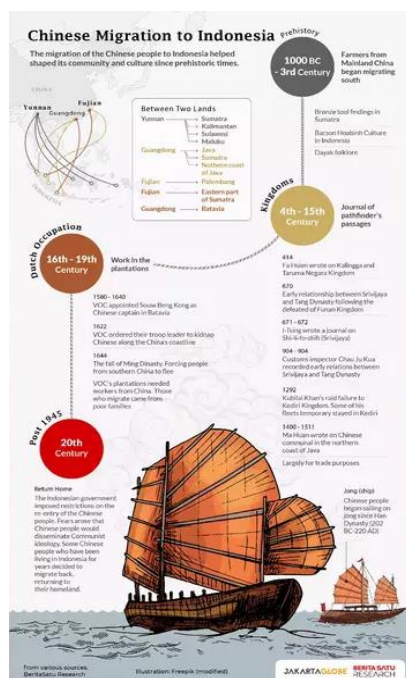


Figure 2. Chinese Migration to Indonesia

(Source: <https://jakartaglobe.id/lifestyle/tracing-the-roots-a-journey-of-chinese-migration-to-indonesia>)

Gresik has been an important port since the time of the Majapahit Kingdom, allowing the arrival of various immigrants from all over the world, including China. Relations between Java and China have been established for a long time in diplomatic and trade relations, Islam came to the archipelago (Suryadinata, 2007). Research shows that the Chinese migration to the Indonesian Archipelago was one of the earliest in human history. A study conducted by Hugh McColl found that Chinese farmers began migrating south during the

Neolithic transition period, namely between 9000-5500 BC, when rice began to be domesticated (Zhou, 2019). These immigrants were divided into two groups, namely those who migrated by land and those who migrated by sea (see Fig. 2). Since then, China-Indonesia (especially Java-China) relations have been quite intensive, as described in the book *History of the Ming Dynasty* and the report compiled by Ma Huan in 1416 (Qurtuby, 2003). Based on historical records, it is shown that trade activities between Java and China in the 15th century increased quite rapidly. The role of the Chinese community in the trade and maritime sectors in Java is also increasing (Lombard, 2018). Until the 17th century, commercial relations continued to link the nations of Southeast Asia more closely to each other. The fact that Chinese influence reached most of Southeast Asia (mainly Java) through maritime trade, not through conquest or colonization, meant that local uniqueness and culture were still able to be maintained or simply adapted due to encounters with other nations (Reid, 2014: 17).

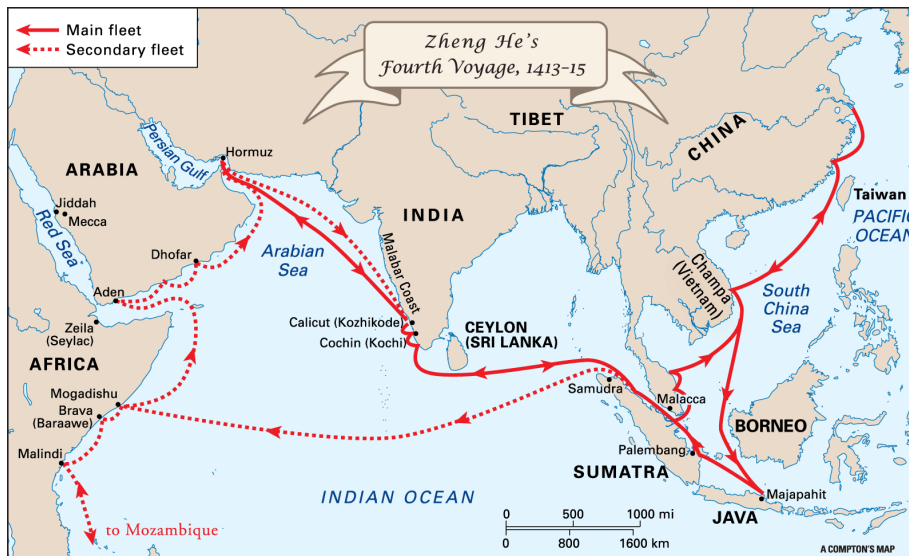


Figure 3. Cheng Ho/Zheng He's Fourth Voyage 1413-1415

(Source: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. 2023)

This relationship continued when China was under the rule of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD) when Cheng Ho's cultural and trade expeditions took place. The story of Cheng Ho's voyage left many amazing historical traces in every country he passed through (Folch, 2020). In Indonesia, including Java, there are historical traces of Cheng-Ho's arrival. Cheng-Ho, who was born with the maiden name Ma Sanbao, who later became Ma He from the Hui ethnicity in Yunnan, was born into a Chinese Muslim community of mixed Mongol-Turkish blood. Cheng-Ho was appointed as the highest commander in charge of thousands of servants in the Palace Household Service (Suryadinata, 2007). Cheng Ho also served the emperor as a secret policeman. Then the emperor gave Cheng Ho a mandate to lead a sea expedition as Commander in Chief through a royal decree, along with several other envoys, such as secretary/scribe Ma Huan who was fluent in Arabic to carry out maritime diplomacy politics. The story of Cheng Ho's journey is contained in *Ming Shi* (history of the Ming Dynasty). Cheng Ho carried out seven sea expeditions from 1405 to 1433. More than 37 countries were visited on these voyages: from various ports in the archipelago and the Indian Ocean to Sri Lanka, Quilon (Ceylon), Kocin, Calicut, Ormuz, Jeddah, Magadisco, and Malindi (Suryadinata, 2007). From Champa to India. Along the Persian Gulf and Red Sea to the coast of Kenya. See Fig. 3.

Trading cities such as Ayutthaya, Malacca, Pasai, Brunei, Gresik and Demak all gained their prosperity because they were used as bases for trading activities by the Chinese in the early 15th century. The sudden change in Ming Dynasty policy left behind a number

of important communities of Chinese traders (often Muslim) in the developing region (Reid, 2014). Emperor Ming banned foreign trade, Chinese communities who were already trading were stranded in the South. The number and status were further increased by those who could not return home after Zheng He's massive expedition in 1405-1435. In the end, this community formed a trading fleet in port cities, such as Gresik and Demak, Palembang, Malacca, Patani and Ayutthaya, organizing trade based on tribute to China and forming a trade network throughout the region (Reid, 2014). The port area, including Gresik, gradually took over the political and cultural leadership in Java from the Hindu-Buddhist centers in the interior of Java.

In relation to Cheng Ho's transnational voyage, Sumanto Al Qurtuby mentioned the term "Sino-Javanese Muslim Cultures" as a form of culture that stretched from Banten, Jakarta, Cirebon, Semarang, Demak, Jepara, Lasem to Gresik and Surabaya as a result of Cheng Ho (and other Chinese Muslims) visit in Java. The form of Sino-Javanese Muslim Cultures is not only visible in various Islamic worship buildings which show a combination of Javanese, Islamic and Chinese elements but also includes various arts and literature. Qurtuby stated that the peak of the Javanese Islamization process occurred in the 14th to 16th centuries (2003). In Java, this period of centuries is very important because it was during this period that the process of strengthening the bases of Islam took place. Islam no longer appears as a sporadic community but has become a structured society with a fairly neat system. At that time, an important historical milestone appeared in Java: the Majapahit Kingdom collapsed, followed by the establishment of Islamic kingdoms on the north coast of Java, centered in Demak. In the span of this year, Sunan Giri to Sunan Prapen ruled in Giri Kedaton, Gresik.

Ming Shi and Ying-yai Sheng-lan's historical notes report that the Chinese people who settled in Java were people from Canton, Zhangzhou, Quanzhou and southern China who left China and settled in several ports on the north coast of eastern Java, especially Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya (Mills 1970). According to these two texts, most of the Chinese who inhabited the northern coast of eastern Java at the beginning of the 15th century lived a very decent life, embraced Islam and were devout in worship. The existence of Muslim Chinese along the north coast of Java was also witnessed and written about by the Dutch traveler Loedewicks as recorded by Stutterheim and Ibnu Batutta as written by Thalal Harb (Suryadinata, 2007). De Graaf, a Dutch historian writing Soerabaja in de China as civil and military employees to manage Giri Kedaton (2011).

The long-standing interaction between China and Java has opened up opportunities for changes in various things, not only in the economic aspect, local arts and culture have also been affected. Mutual exchange and influence between Chinese and native people encouraged the emergence of variants of trade commodities. The manufacturing centers of north coast Java in the 15th century were centered in Gresik and Surabaya (bronze), Tuban and Sidayu (gold), and Jepara (household furniture) (Reid, 2014). Reid continued that the concentration of craftsmen who actively sell their products through a networked market system tends to occur in the former capitals where the previous patron kings were seated.

The large role of foreigners and rulers in trade in most Southeast Asian cities ensured that the majority of traders and ship owners were men (Kumar, 1987). However, there are a significant number of local women who join these circles and occupy important positions. In the history of socio-cultural development in Gresik, there are also female figures who have important positions in the advancement of trade as well as the process of Islamization in Java. Namely, Shishi Daniangzi or Si Dae-Jie who moved to Java from Palembang (Sriwijaya) and became harbormaster in Gresik. Tan Yeok Seong provides good evidence of how Si Dae-Jie embraced Islam in the 15th century and raised a child who would later become one of the guardians, Sunan Giri. Si Da-Jie alias Shishi Daniangzi was the eldest daughter of an elite non-Muslim Chinese merchant in Palembang, Shi Jinqing (a Ming Peace Official who was based in Palembang in 1407). Si

Da-Jie left Palembang for Java in the 1440s and was appointed Harbor Master of Gresik port by the Majapahit rulers from 1458 to 1483. Since then Si Dae-Jie embraced Islam and changed his name to Nyai Pinatih, or also known as Nyai Gede Pinatih to date. The appearance of the name Pinatih describes the religious, economic and political forces that influenced each other within the Hindu-Javanese Majapahit court. Around the 1500s, Nyai Gede Pinatih held the position of harbormaster of Gresik, reportedly sending trading boats as far as Bali, Maluku and Cambodia (Reid, 2014: 190).

During the 16th century, a remarkable cultural transformation occurred in the port cities of northern Java, which at that time were centers of wealth and ideas that attracted talented Javanese. Mosques and holy tombs were built with a mixture of brick and Majapahit decorative art and giant wooden pillars imitated Javanese pavilions for Islamic ritual purposes. The creativity of Javanese stage art was changed or created as a form of replacing the human form with a puppet shadow which was adapted so as not to disturb devout Muslims. (Reid, 2014).

One Chinese manuscript mentions writing materials compiled around the 1200s, admitting that there were only 2 countries outside China that also made paper, namely Korea and Java. Javanese paper is thick and durable with a length of about 8 meters. Javanese paper attracted Chinese attention because of its use in conveying stories depicted on scrolls and sung by a storyteller (*wayang beber*). What must have been witnessed was Javanese *dluwang*, which is rough paper made by beating and soaking mulberry tree fibers. The same fiber material is also used in China (Reid, 2014). Large amounts of paper from China were imported into Southeast Asia around the 1500s, used in Malacca, Java, Siam and Cambodia.

#### Light Tradition: Sino-Javanese Muslim Belief Made Visual

When two cultures or civilizations interact, there are at least three possibilities: conflict, peaceful coexistence, or the emergence of a new culture. However, if you look at history, especially the history of relations between China and surrounding countries, such as Indonesia, the third possibility is the one that occurs most often. The influence of Chinese culture in Indonesia is very strong and has resulted in cultural developments which are a combination of local and Chinese elements. One of them is the light/lantern tradition.

The discovery of fire is one of the important innovations in the history of human civilization. For humans, fire is a useful energy and has been used in life rites for hundreds of years. The control of fire by ancient humans was a turning point in the evolution of human culture. When ancient humans discovered how to make fire, their lives changed significantly: they began to gather together, socialize, and ultimately led to the birth of a cultural revolution in the civilization of living creatures on earth.

Fire is often considered a powerful symbol in many religions around the world, and has varying meanings and significance depending on the cultural and religious context. Fire also often has ritualistic meaning in the practices of religious traditions. In the context of the Southeast Asian region, fire is almost inseparable from people's daily lives. In particular, fire is present in religious ceremonies and cultural activities to commemorate certain moments, from human birth to death ceremonies. In Hindu religious beliefs, fire is considered sacred which involves offerings made to the Fire God as a means of purification, seeking blessings, and communicating with the divine. Fire is also associated with Agni, who is considered the god of fire and an intermediary between humans and the gods. In Buddhism, fire is often seen as a symbol of transformation and purification. In some Buddhist traditions, fire is used in rituals to burn offerings and purify negative energy. The concept of "inner fire" or "inner light" may also represent the intrinsic nature of enlightenment and spiritual awakening. In Islam, fire is mentioned in the Qur'an and is often associated with punishment in the afterlife for those who disobey Allah (Ghehi, 2012). Fire also symbolizes purification and is used in the ritual of *aarti*: the ceremony of waving a burning lamp in Sufi practice. Fire means purification, renewal of life, energy,



protection, visibility, destruction, a medium for conveying messages. Fire can symbolize spiritual power, transcendence, illumination, manifestation of holiness, breath of life, inspiration, and enlightenment (Muhammad, 2021: 107).

Historographic records regarding the encounter of Chinese people in maritime trade routes and migration to the Southeast Asia region from 1413 to 1436 are recorded in detail in W.P Groeneveldt's research entitled *Archipelago in Chinese Notes* (Ubaedillah, 2023). Indirectly, this meeting left behind a legacy of knowledge, both in social, economic, religious, cultural contexts, and of course the introduction of lantern-making craft technology in the Southeast Asian region. Meanwhile, the use of visual elements in paintings shows that the perspective of the Southeast Asian region has a strong basis and unique potential compared to the West. One of the impressive Chinese inventions that was spread throughout the world was the invention of paper and lighting devices (lanterns). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the word 'lantern' refers to a portable lighting device, which functions as a lamp or light source. The Big Indonesian Dictionary defines a lantern as a lamp or small lamp with a glass cover. In the beginning, lanterns served as a source of light when electric lights were not as easily accessible as they are today. Traditional lanterns in the early phase used simple technology in the form of wax or oily wicks. This light source is capable of providing weak light, therefore it must be protected with a cover to avoid wind blowing which prevents the fire as a light source from dimming and going out. Lanterns have long historical roots. It is estimated that the tradition of installing lanterns has existed in mainland China since the Xi Han Dynasty, around the 3rd century AD. The emergence of lanterns almost coincided with the introduction of paper-making techniques. Rachel Deason in "A Brief History of Chinese Lanterns" said that lanterns originally had a simple purpose, namely as a source of light (Zhang, 2018).

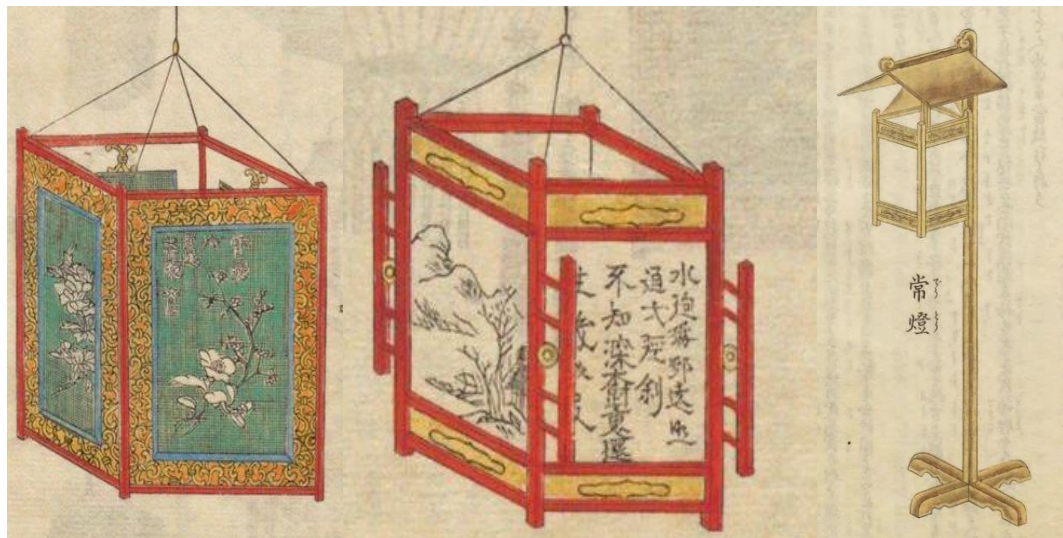


Figure 4. Various ancient lanterns from China

(Source: British Library)

The emergence of lanterns almost coincided with the emergence of paper-making techniques, so many lanterns use paper as their raw material. Traditional Chinese lanterns are divided into three types, namely Palace Lantern (royal lantern), Gauze Lantern (paper lantern), and Shadow-picture Lantern (shadow-picture lantern) (The CLI team, 2022.). Chinese lanterns are a traditional craft that dates back thousands of years and have been used to light up the night. Throughout history, lanterns in China have come in a variety of styles, types, and functions and have been used in a variety of ways. Lanterns can be flown into the sky, hung in front of doors, placed indoors, floated on rivers, or installed in religious places. In general, lanterns function as lighting, a medium for prayer,

celebrations, status symbols, guiding spirits, as decoration, as a medium for education or religious learning as well as purely for entertainment (Zhang, 2022). People from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD) made lantern frames from bamboo, wood, or wheat straw. Then put a candle in the middle and stretch silk or paper over it so that the flame will not be blown away by the wind. In later times, Buddhist monks adopted lanterns as part of their worship ritual on the 15th day of the first month of the lunar calendar (The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica., 2023). On the emperor's orders, people joined in the ritual and lit lanterns in honor of the Buddha and carried them to the palace in Luoyang. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the practice turned into a festival, which is still celebrated every year. So, Chinese lantern and lantern festivals basically originated in the Han dynasty and then soon spread throughout the world.

Part of the Gresik area consists of barren, arid land and hard limestone hills, making it impossible for the Gresik population to become an agrarian society. Rice and vegetable farming which require sufficient soil and water will not grow in Gresik. Field farmers cultivate dry crops. This is what encourages the residents of Gresik to make a living as craftsmen and traders. At the end of the 19th century, some Gresik people had grown into small capitalists relying on home industry and trade which were never replaced by other professions. Even Sunan Giri and Nyi Ageng Pinatih, one of the important figures from Gresik, set an example as religious figures as well as successful traders (Zainuddin, 2010). As a charismatic figure, Sunan Giri is able to become a role model among the surrounding community. So the tenacity of the struggle for life of the people of Sunan Giri's era still continues to this day. Entrepreneurship and religiosity color the character of the Gresik people. Entrepreneurship remains widespread not only in terms of cultivating pond products such as the milkfish market, but also includes other businesses, such as pottery, leather, metal, woven pandan, sarongs, mats, skullcaps, udheng (a kind of traditional headband), and Damar Kurung lantern crafts (See Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Damar Kurung Lantern

(Source: Damar Kurung Institute, Gresik 2017)

In Gresik, Damar Kurung lanterns developed in the 16th century, during the Southeast Asian maritime trade route, where Gresik was a leading port city at that time. The Damar Kurung lantern from Gresik is made from cut bamboo strips and covered with paper, shaped like a block with a triangular crown at the top. Meanwhile, each side is equipped with illustrations that divide the story into 4-12 chapters. These illustrations generally convey stories and messages about community activities. Damar Kurung has become a cultural tradition for Muslim residents in Gresik to welcome 'Lailatul Qadar' by hanging

Damar Kurung in front of the house. 'Lailatul Qadar' is a very special night in the Islamic religion. This night is considered a night full of blessings, where Allah SWT sends down His angels and determines all matters of this world and the hereafter. The night of Lailatul Qadar only occurs in the month of Ramadan, so there will be many who want to hunt to get rewards from this blessed night. The scholars observe the night of Lailatul Qadar on the odd night of the last 10th day of the holy month of Ramadan such as the 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th and 29th.

Compared with the lantern variants from China, there is nothing really similar to the Damar Kurung lantern. However, art and visual culture can still be traced from other artifacts that contain cultural elements from China and Islam. As in the design of the Qur'an manuscript. Qur'anic manuscripts have been faithfully copied for centuries, displaying diverse styles in calligraphy and illumination, often reflecting their place of origin and time of production (Baker, 2007). Beautifying the manuscripts of the Qur'an can be considered an act of religious devotion. Every effort to copy and beautify the Al-Qur'an manuscript is also meaningful as an effort to build cultural identity. A research project funded by the British Academy entitled *Islam, Trade and Politics in the Indian Ocean*, which ran from 2009 to 2012, aimed to investigate all aspects of relations between the largest power in the Middle East, namely the Ottoman empire, and the Muslim states of the Malay archipelago in Southeast Asia in the last five centuries. This research project produced two books, one of which discusses culture and intellectuals in producing Al-Qur'an manuscripts. It discusses and displays very beautiful ancient manuscripts of the Qur'an, as well as describing the differences in each design style based on the region where the manuscript was produced. There are four main categories of Al-Quran in Southeast Asia: East Coast of the Malay Peninsula, Aceh, Java and the Philippines-Mindanao Region (Gallop, 2021). The main characteristics of manuscripts from Aceh include: (1) Rectangular outlines that extend above and below the boundaries of the text blocks, (2) Arches above and below the text blocks in the form of hollow ogival domes, (3) Use of red, black and white, and (4) The main decorative features are left white to contrast the colored background (Gallop, 2021). See Fig. 6.



Figure 6. Illuminated frames at the start of a Qur'an from Aceh, ca. 1820s.

(Source: British Library)

This is different from the Javanese manuscripts, which have their own stylistic characteristics. The main features of the Javanese Qur'an are: (1) The design of one side of the page is exactly symmetrical to the other side of the page, (2) The decoration is along all four sides of the page, not three sides as in other Southeast Asian manuscripts, (3) The use of indigo (a trade commodity cultivated by the Dutch in the 1800s to meet European demand), and (4) The ayn sign on the edge, which was used as an indication for prostration (Gallop, 2006). As shown in Fig. 7. There is one material aspect that indicates a manuscript of the Qur'an originates from Java, namely the use of locally produced



Javanese paper or dluwang, which is made from the bark of the mulberry tree, *Broussonetia papyrifera*. Dluwang is technically classified as bark cloth or tapa, not paper, because it is not made from the dry residue of a water-based solution. There are indications that in earlier periods, before the 18th century, dluwang had been exported from Java throughout the archipelago or even made locally on other islands, because the Qur'an written on dluwang has been found as far away as Ternate (Gallop, 2021). However, with the increasing availability through the European trade of higher quality paper, the use of dluwang outside Java appears to have waned. Therefore, the use of dluwang in the Qur'an can be considered a reliable indicator of Javanese origins.



Figure 7. Decorated double frames in red and black ink, at the start of a Qur'an from Java, 18th-early 19th century.

(Source: British Library)

The Chinese also produced Al-Qur'an manuscripts with unique characteristics through the use of calligraphy. Islamic art began to appear in China during the Tang Dynasty in the 7th century and then during the Yuan and Ming Dynasties (Al-Mannai, 2021). Sino-Islamic art is displayed in many decorative styles, which is due to the growing relations between the two worlds as part of the cultural exchange between East and West. The Chinese Qur'an was produced in several different volumes. The script used is a variation of muḥaqqaq and is written in a way that suggests the pen strokes are influenced by Chinese calligraphy (Welch, 1979). It is often referred to as *Sinī* ('Chinese') Arabic. Illumination and decoration have the same function in all Qur'ans, namely to beautify them, but in Chinese Qur'an manuscripts the influence of local style and culture is clearly visible, without violating Islamic practices in sacred art (Sims-Williams, 2017). The adaptation of symbols that are common in everyday life in Chinese art and culture is very striking in the appearance of the Al-Qur'an manuscript. As seen at the opening of the end of the 17th century Al-Qur'an, the lantern motif becomes a visual emphasis for the text of the Al-Qur'an. As shown in Fig. 8, 9 and 10. The lantern structure is outlined in gold and arranged in a rectangle drawn with double red lines. The impression of a Chinese lantern is further enhanced by hanging tassels attached to hooks on the outside of the structure. Islamic teachings prohibit the worship of idols and forbid depictions of humans and animals, especially in religious contexts. Therefore, when illustrating nature, Islamic artists turned to flowers or other shapes/symbols, as shown in this lantern painting. Calligraphy art also decorates many Al-Qur'an manuscripts. This is not surprising because initially China was the first to discover high quality paper and pens with fine hairs, so that

the art of Chinese calligraphy was much liked by other nations, including forms of Islamic calligraphy in the Qur'an.

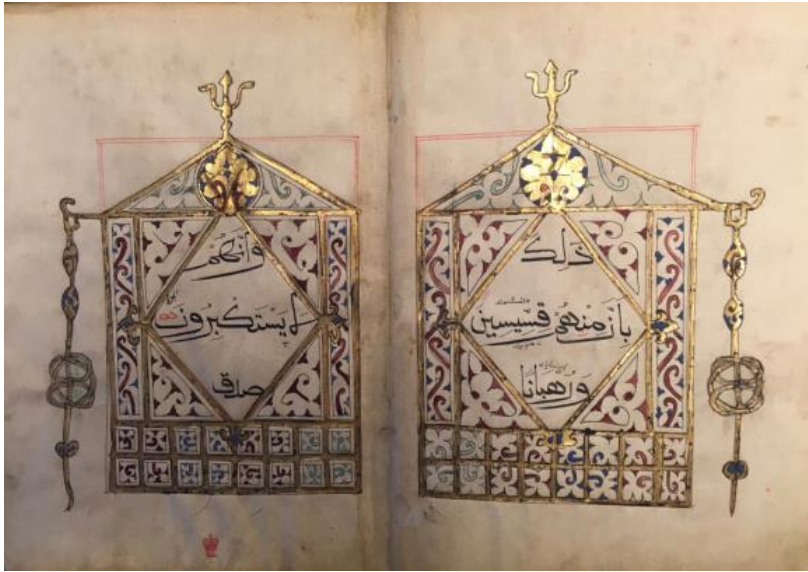


Figure 8. The decorated final text opening with lantern motif from a seventeenth-century Qur'an.

(Source: British Library)



Figure 9. Holy Quran in Islamic Chinese Calligraphy by Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644).

(Source: [fotografia.islamoriente.com](http://fotografia.islamoriente.com))





Figure 10. Holy Quran in Islamic Chinese Calligraphy 1138/1725-26 AD

(Source: <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-5881382>)

Based on the previous explanation of the design of the Al-Qur'an manuscript, it can be observed that the Damar Kurung lantern has similarities (especially in the cross-sectional structure of the lantern) with the design of the Al-Qur'an manuscripts from Java and China (especially on the edge/border of the text). It is rectangular in shape with the top (or bottom) equipped with a triangular shape. So, it does not rule out the possibility that Damar Kurung is an artistic and cultural artifact resulting from meetings and acculturation between Chinese immigrants and Javanese people. According to the oral tradition of the Gresik people, Damar Kurung is believed to have existed since the 16th century when Sunan Prapen (the next generation of Sunan Giri) reigned at Giri Kedaton. Traditional paintings from the 1800s depicting the figure of Prince Diponegoro show the presence of a lantern similar to Damar Kurung. See Fig. 11.

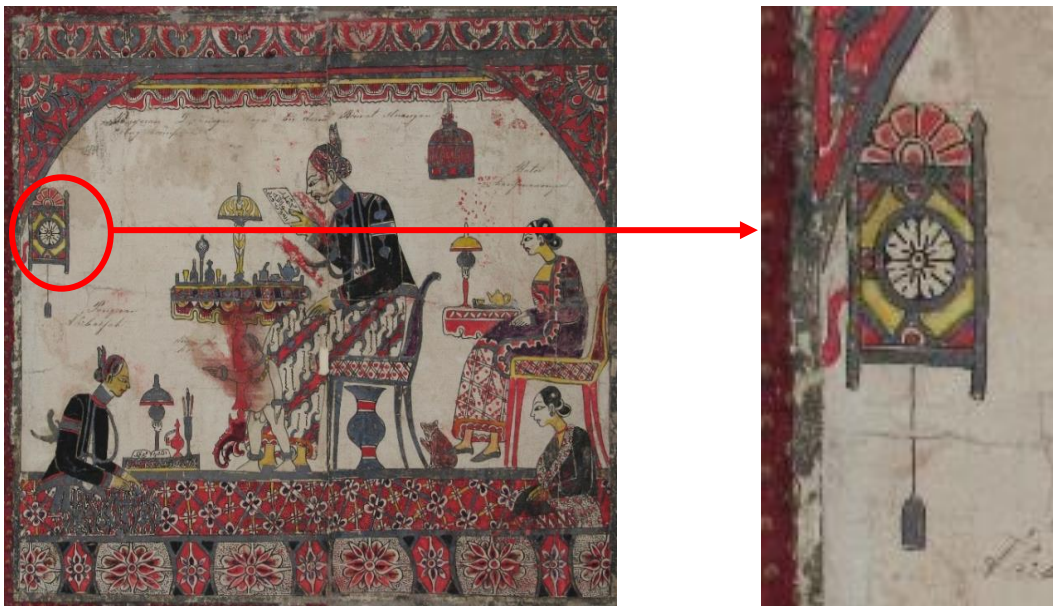


Figure 11. Prince Diponegoro Painting by anonymous Javanese artist

(Source:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18DQw0wkbUdwzfFrLRuQbZ1Ks3k5F69XL/view>)

Damar Kurung is one of the traditional artistic relics of the ancestors of the Gresik people in the form of decorative lanterns. The paintings that decorate Damar Kurung depict the civilization and life of the Gresik people. Koeshandari (2009: 58) defines Damar Kurung

as 'damar' is a lamp/light and 'kurung' is a frame. So Damar Kurung is a lighting device that is framed in such a way as to become a lantern, which is usually lit when the sun begins to set or just before the Maghrib prayer. Damar Kurung crafts are made to entertain children who are waiting for the arrival of tarawih prayers during the month of Ramadan. Damar Kurung as part of the East Javanese traditional fine arts is a syncretic result of various ethnicities and cultures between Chinese, Islamic and Javanese culture. Often the paintings contain mythological meanings, sagas or moral messages through metaphors, aesthetic language and the form of symbols that decorate each side of the lantern.

Damar Kurung is generally used by the Gresik people in the process of cleaning their family's ancestral graves, which is called the padusan tradition or megengan or nyadran or ruwahan. Padusan or megengan or nyadran or ruwahan is a traditional slametan ceremony held every year during the month of Ramadan to honor the spirits of ancestors who have passed away (Mibtadin, 2023). The Gresik people believe that Damar Kurung functions as a light for people who have died and their spirits are still considered alive and living temporarily in the grave or, as a temporary realm before entering the afterlife. According to Javanese understanding, the spirits of those who have died wander around their homes, they still have contact with their living family. From here, the tradition of cleaning the village emerged, including cleaning the graves, accompanied by giving offerings. For padusan purposes, the light of Damar Kurung is considered to be the personification of the deceased. So that the fire does not die, the fire is contained/protected in a lantern.

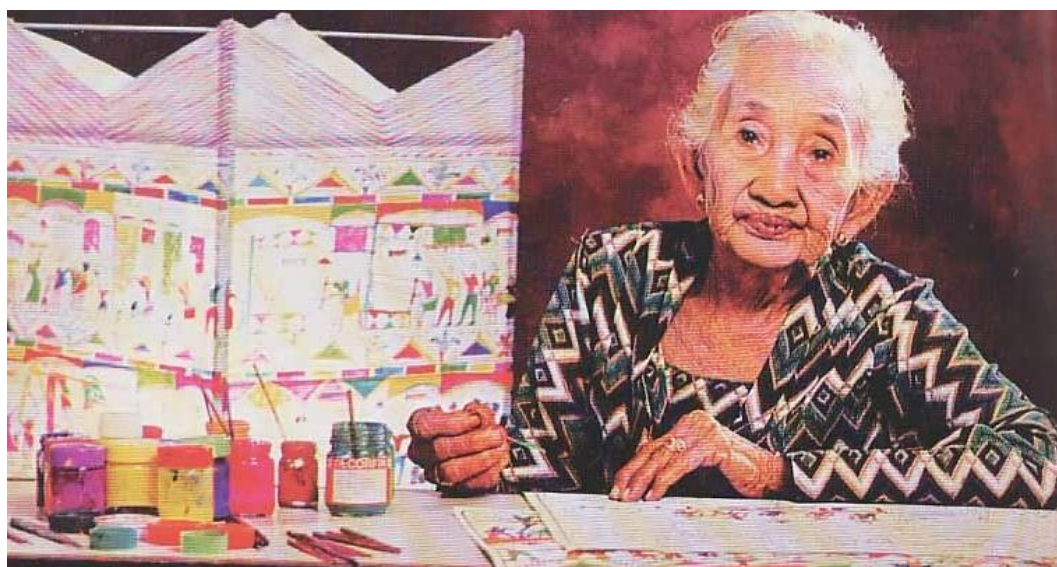


Figure 12. Masmundari and Damar Kurung

(Source: Damar Kurung Institute)

The artist was Masmundari (1904-2005). She was very old when she actively made Damar Kurung, but her persistence in making this visual art led to Damar Kurung becoming the national intangible heritage of the Republic of Indonesia in 2017. The beauty and uniqueness of Damar Kurung lies in the paintings that decorate each side of the lantern. On the cover there are various pictures. The images consist of flat human figures like puppet shadow (*wayang kulit*) visuals with the theme of the daily activities of the Gresik people. The visual forms that Masmundari paints do not recognize perspective (Koehandari, 2009). All the objects in the picture are painted in a row to the side or shifted upwards using dividing lines as dividers between scenes. Masmundari uses food coloring (*sumbo*) to color each object in her paintings. The color characteristics are bright, even and without gradation. On the empty image area, arrow symbols, zig zag

lines and three dots are painted which indicate moving objects in the image. Rhythm and movement in painting can be identified through expressive images, such as zig zag lines, three dots and arrows. The zig zag line at the top of the picture area/on the roof indicates that the scene takes place in the evening/night. Point three is a visualization of the sound echo (noise) produced from the contents. Meanwhile, the arrows are a visualization of the movement of air/wind circulation, usually also indicating that the scene occurs outdoors/exterior (Damar Kurung Institute, 2016). The human figures that Masmundari draws are human figures carrying out various daily activities with a stylized style like that of wayang kulit or wayang beber. Masmundari also often draws objects in the form of animals, but this is limited to poultry (chickens or birds) and occasionally horses (for pulling carriages/palanquins). Plants, especially trees, are often drawn as symbols that limit the dimensions of space. The images of trees and plants in the Damar Kurung painting indicate that the scene in the painting takes place in an open/exterior space.

In her creative process, Masmundari has a drawing style that is related to the desired format lines. There are two types of formats, namely fields and formlines. The field defines a different time and space in each sequence, with a top-down viewing direction for sacred themes and bottom-up viewing for profane story themes. Meanwhile, the formline determines the characteristics of each image object, by displaying the characteristics of each sequence so that it can be told. For stories with sacred themes, each sequence has a viewing direction from left to right (prasavya), whereas for profane story themes you can start from any direction, with any viewing direction, because each sequence at one time contains several events (Koeshandari, 2009 ). The principles and organization of the format in Damar Kurung paintings are absolute so that every image object in the painting can be told. Each Damar Kurung painting with an area of approximately 40 x 30 cm is usually divided into 3-4 sequences. Painting techniques like those used by Masmundari are believed to be traditional knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation. Where the characteristics of the paintings are typical of the visual arts found in Eastern civilization (including China).

Both Masmundari and Muslim painters or designers of Qur'anic texts have something in common in producing art: they do not ignore the dimension of emptiness even though it could be used wonderfully, nor do they ignore the basis of three-dimensional perspective (Okasha, 1977: 469). They use virtual representations and rely on the intellectual truth of things without being bound to time, space, or visual reality. They have a tendency to rely on a two-dimensional vacuum to create flatness throughout their designs. But at the same time it also combines with emptiness (Al-Anin, 2000: 17). Damar Kurung paintings and Al-Qur'ani manuscript designs both avoid the rules of three-dimensional perspective, and are devoid of light and shadow. They use a distinctive strategy to create a sense of depth, namely by enlarging the represented character, meaning the more important the character is. The figures are represented in a two-dimensional vacuum without considering the principles of perspective. Another way is by shifting the objects behind evenly over the design plane. This results in a complex and unique visual organisation of a flat scene, which distinguishes it from the characteristics of Western visual art works (Alam, 1982: 241).

Because of the beauty and uniqueness of Masmundari's Damar Kurung, in 2020, Roger Nelson through the National Gallery Singapore published a book entitled 'Modern Art of Southeast Asia: Introductions from A to Z' and included Masmundari's name in it. The book attempts to record the first modern works of art in the Southeast Asia region with a transnational approach to narrating the history of the region through 60 key ideas involving more than 200 examples of works of art. Nelson includes the name Masmundari, maestro artist Damar Kurung from Gresik district as one of the artists who represents craft techniques as well as painting with visual narratives in art practice (2020: 50).



## Conclusion

Art not only functions as a creative expression for the artist, but art is also able to capture the collective memory of a society and reflect its changing values and culture. Art can be a language shared between different individuals, nations and cultures. Art has the ability to make immigrant voices heard. The arts help people to articulate their own values and beliefs while better understanding the values and beliefs of others. The phenomenon of Sino-Javanese Muslim Cultures through visual arts shows that Chinese immigrants and local residents (Javanese) once lived side by side peacefully in Indonesia before their harmonious relationship was finally destroyed by the Dutch and the New Order regime. More than that, their harmony was not only demonstrated by the transformation of Javanese-Chinese culture, but also penetrated the world of artistic practice. Damar Kurung lanterns and Al-Qur'an manuscripts with a calligraphic approach are manifestations of Sino-Javanese Muslim Cultures that occurred in Gresik. Chinese immigrants came with their invention, knowledge and technology regarding paper (dluwang) giving Indonesia the opportunity to develop written art and culture, which was initially limited to oral culture. The historical journey of Chinese immigrants and their impact in socio-cultural aspects shows that Chinese people in Indonesia are not 'new people' or 'foreigners', but are part of the Republic of Indonesia.

Conflict in Interest: There is no Conflict in Interest

## Acknowledgements

Aniendya Christianna, the author, would like to thank Petra Christian University Surabaya for funding her dissertation until this article was written. Thank you also to Petra Christian University's Visual Communication Design Study Program, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, for their assistance with this research. The author would also like to express gratitude to the Doctoral Program of Fine Art and Design, Faculty of Fine Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, which provided research during the mentoring process with the promoters. The author is also very grateful to the founder of Damar Kurung Institute: Novan Effendy, Rokayah Family (Masmundari's daughter), and Gresik art activist Bapak Kris Adji.

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