

The Arabs in Early Palembang Darussalam Sultanate: The History and Implication

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Abstract

This study examines the significant contributions of the Arab community, specifically from Hadramaut, Yemen, to the socio-religious and cultural development of Palembang, Indonesia. The Arab community, primarily Sunni Muslims, arrived during the era of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate in the 17th century and played a pivotal role in the Islamization of the region and the enrichment of local identity through cultural and social values. This research addresses the reception of Arab-Islamic practices by the local population, which resulted in notable acculturation, evident in religious traditions such as Maulid Nabi and zikr practices, as well as the incorporation of Islamic principles in governance and daily life. The study employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive approach, relying on in-depth interviews with prominent figures and descendants of the Arab community, as well as an analysis of historical documents, including manuscripts and reports from archaeological sites. It focuses on historical areas like Kampung Arab Al-Munawwar and Ulu-Ilir, which are central to the Arab community's legacy in Palembang. The findings highlight the establishment of Islamic educational institutions, such as madrasahs and pesantrens, by prominent figures like Habib

Alwi Bahsin. These institutions played key roles in disseminating religious and general knowledge, fostering intellectual and social empowerment. Additionally, evidence of the reception of Islamic values into local culture can be found in acculturated traditions, culinary practices, and community activities that go beyond well-known practices like Maulid and zikr. In conclusion, the Arab community's contributions extend beyond religious propagation, encompassing education, social development, and cultural reception, ultimately shaping Palembang's identity as a vital center of Islamic civilization in the Nusantara.

Keywords: Arab community, Palembang, Islamization, cultural acculturation, Islamic education, socio-religious development, Nusantara.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kontribusi signifikan dari komunitas Arab, khususnya yang berasal dari Hadramaut, Yaman, terhadap perkembangan sosial-religius dan budaya di Palembang, Indonesia. Komunitas Arab yang mayoritas bermazhab Sunni ini tiba pada masa Kesultanan Palembang Darussalam pada abad ke-17 dan memainkan peran penting dalam proses Islamisasi wilayah tersebut serta memperkaya identitas lokal melalui nilai-nilai sosial dan budaya. Penelitian ini membahas penerimaan praktik-praktik Arab-Islam oleh masyarakat lokal, yang menghasilkan akulturasi yang terlihat dalam tradisi keagamaan seperti Maulid Nabi dan praktik *zikr*, serta penerapan prinsip-prinsip Islam dalam pemerintahan dan kehidupan sehari-hari. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif, dengan memanfaatkan wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh-tokoh penting dan keturunan komunitas Arab, serta analisis dokumen historis, termasuk manuskrip dan laporan dari situs-situs arkeologi. Fokus penelitian ini adalah pada kawasan sejarah seperti Kampung Arab Al-Munawwar dan Ulu-Ilir, yang menjadi pusat warisan komunitas Arab di Palembang. Temuan penelitian ini menyoroti pendirian lembaga pendidikan Islam seperti madrasah dan pesantren oleh tokoh-tokoh terkemuka seperti Habib Alwi Bahsin, yang memainkan peran penting dalam menyebarkan pengetahuan agama dan umum, serta memberdayakan intelektual dan sosial. Selain itu, bukti penerimaan nilai-nilai Islam dalam budaya lokal dapat ditemukan dalam tradisi yang terakulturasi, praktik kuliner, dan kegiatan komunitas yang lebih luas daripada hanya Maulid dan zikr yang sudah dikenal luas. Kesimpulannya, kontribusi komunitas Arab melampaui penyebaran agama, mencakup pendidikan, pengembangan sosial, dan penerimaan budaya, yang pada akhirnya membentuk identitas Palembang sebagai pusat peradaban Islam yang penting di Nusantara.

Kata Kunci: Komunitas Arab, Palembang, Islamisasi, akulturasi budaya, pendidikan Islam, perkembangan sosial-keagamaan, Nusantara.

Introduction

Palembang is a city rich in history and culture, Palembang has long been a hub of interaction among various ethnic communities, including the Arab community, which has significantly influenced the region's social, cultural, and educational development. Since their arrival during the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate era in the 17th century, immigrants from Hadramaut, Yemen, have introduced Islam and enriched local identity with their social and cultural values.¹ The interaction between the Arab community and the local population has resulted in profound acculturation, evident in religious traditions such as the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday (Maulid Nabi) and the practice of zikr, as well as in the implementation of Islamic law in daily life.²

A key contribution of the Arab community in Palembang lies in the field of education. Prominent Arab figures, such as Sayyid Alaydrus, Sayyid Mustofa Alaidrus, Sayyid Idrus Abdullah Alaydrus, Sayyid Abdurrahman Maula Tuga'ah, and Sayyid Muhammad Ali Al-Haddad, played an active role in establishing Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs and pesantrens. These institutions served as centers for disseminating knowledge and strengthening scholarly networks, offering religious education alongside general knowledge. This reflects the process of adaptation and acculturation between the Arab community and local society, resulting in new forms of educational traditions in Palembang.

From the perspective of cultural acculturation theory, the interaction between the Arab community and the local society brought significant changes to both social and cultural aspects. This process involved cultural exchange and the creation of a new identity that integrated elements from both communities. For instance, in the culinary field, acculturation is evident in Palembang's signature dishes, which combine local and Arab flavors, creating a unique culinary identity. Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategic role of the Arab community in shaping the social and

¹ Aulia Novemy Dhita and Sesilia Dwi Putri, 'Membaca Keturunan Arab Di Palembang: Dari Kedatangan Hingga Kini', *Jurnal Tamaddun Jurnal Sejarah Dan Kebudayaan Islam*, 9.1 (2021) <<https://doi.org/10.24235/tamaddun.v9i1.8174>>.

² Apriana Apriana, 'Asimilasi Kultural Arab-Melayu Palembang', *Medina-Te Jurnal Studi Islam*, 15.2 (2020), 199–214 <<https://doi.org/10.19109/medinate.v15i2.4248>>.

religious identity of Palembang's society.³

The study seeks to explore in greater depth the role of the Arab community in shaping the social, cultural, and educational structures of Palembang. Using the framework of cultural acculturation theory and social dynamics, this research aims to answer questions about how the Arab community has influenced Palembang society, the traditions that emerged from these cultural interactions, and the contributions of the educational institutions they established to the development of local education. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute significantly to existing literature and enhance understanding of the Arab community's influence within the historical and cultural context of Palembang. To strengthen the authoritative sources, the inclusion of manuscripts and reports from historical sites is recommended.⁴

One of the primary contributions of the Arab community in Palembang lies in the field of education. Prominent Arab figures actively participated in establishing Islamic educational institutions such as madrasahs and pesantrens. Study indicates that these institutions served as centers for disseminating knowledge and strengthening scholarly networks.⁵ In this context, the education offered focused on religious instruction and integrated general knowledge, producing generations prepared to face contemporary challenges.⁶ This reflects the process of adaptation and acculturation between the Arab community and local society, resulting in new forms of educational traditions in Palembang.⁷

Within the framework of cultural acculturation theory, the interaction between the Arab community and the local society in Palembang brought significant changes to social and cultural aspects.

³ Yuyun Febriyanti, 'Nasi Minyak, a Product of Arabian Culinary Heritage, as a Gastronomy Tourism in Palembang City', *The Journal Gastronomy Tourism*, 7.2 (2020), 68–73 <<https://doi.org/10.17509/gastur.v7i2.29863>>.

⁴ Yulia Tri Samiha, Andi Candra, and Amir Rusdi, 'Internalization of The Value of Islamic Education Through The System of Kindness and Religious Harmony in Village Communities of 10 ULU Palembang', *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 12.01 (2023), 181–90 <<https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v12i01.3830>>.

⁵ Indah Zulhidayati and Aan Sudarwanto, 'The Existence of Bangsawan Theatre in Palembang Viewed From the Demographic Aspect', *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 07.01 (2024), 286–91 <<https://doi.org/10.47191/ijssshr/v7-i01-38>>.

⁶ Febriyanti.

⁷ Syarifuddin Syukur and others, 'Perkembangan Tradisi Ziarah Kubro Pada Masyarakat Kota Palembang Tahun 1970-2008', *Dialogia*, 20.1 (2022), 28–43 <<https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v20i1.2770>>.

The study indicates that this process involved cultural exchange and created a new identity that integrated elements from both communities.⁸ For instance, in the culinary field, acculturation is evident in Palembang's signature dishes, which combine local and Arab flavours, creating a unique culinary identity.⁹ Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategic role of the Arab community in shaping the social and religious identity of Palembang society.

Overall, this study aims to delve deeper into the role of the Arab community in shaping the social, cultural, and educational structures of Palembang. Using the framework of cultural acculturation theory and social dynamics, this research seeks to answer questions about how the Arab community has influenced Palembang society, the traditions that emerged from cultural interactions, and the contributions of the educational institutions they established to the development of local education. It is hoped that the findings of this study will make a significant contribution to the existing literature and enhance understanding of the Arab community's influence in the historical and cultural context of Palembang.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore the development of Islamic society in Palembang, focusing on the role of Arab community leaders in Islamic propagation (da'wah) and education. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including descendants of prominent Arab figures and influential members of the Arab community. Informants include descendants of figures such as Habib Alwi Bahsin, Habib Husin Al-Munawwar, Habib Muhammad bin Abdullah Al-Habsyi, Ustadz Abdullah bin Syekh Baroqbah, and Habib Ali bin Abdullah Al-Habsyi, who were pivotal in the establishment of Islamic educational institutions in Palembang. The total number of informants is specified as 5 informants. Interviews were conducted with a diverse

⁸ None Aflatun Muchtar and others, 'The Intercultural Accommodation Between Ethnic Arabics, Chines, and Malays in Palembang', *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama*, 18.1 (2024), 115–32 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2024.181-08>>.

⁹ Siti Elly Sulastris and others, 'Operational Financial Management of Jami'atul Qura' wal Hufadz Islamic Boarding School Palembang', *Journal Corner of Education Linguistics and Literature*, 2.2 (2022), 181–90 <<https://doi.org/10.54012/jcell.v2i2.94>>.

group of informants, ensuring a comprehensive perspective on the subject.

Additionally, historical data was gathered through the examination of historical documents, including archival materials stored in local museums and government archives. These documents consist of manuscripts, official records, and reports detailing the Arab community's role in Palembang's religious and social life. Family records from the descendants of prominent Arab figures were also examined, including personal letters, religious documents, and records relating to the founding of madrasahs and pesantrens. These materials are crucial for understanding the socio-religious dynamics and contributions of the Arab community in the region.

Data analysis was carried out using a thematic method, organizing the information into key themes such as da'wah, education, and social relations. Triangulation was employed to ensure data validity by cross-referencing information from interviews, historical documents, and family records. The study centers on historical areas such as Kampung Arab Al-Munawwar and Ulu-Ilir, which are closely linked to the Arab community's legacy in Palembang. Interview transcripts will be provided as supplementary material to support the findings and ensure transparency in the research process.

Re Prominent Arab figures sults and Discussion

1. The Arrival and Growth of the Arab Community in Palembang

The arrival of the Arab community in Palembang is closely tied to the history of Islamization in the Nusantara (Malay Archipelago). According to theories accepted by historians, Islam entered the region as early as the 7th century CE through international trade routes connecting Gujarat, India, and Arabia. This process leveraged the role of strategic ports such as Palembang, which at that time served as a cosmopolitan trading hub under the Srivijaya Kingdom. Palembang became one of the key centres for forming a cosmopolitan Muslim community from the 7th century until the era of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate in the 17th century.¹⁰

¹⁰ Maryamah Maryamah and others, 'Islam Budaya Melayu: Analisis Akulturasi Bangsa Cina dan Arab di Kota Palembang', 2.2 (2023), 76–81 <<https://doi.org/10.55904/histeria.v2i2.939>>.

The development of Islam in Palembang became more prominent with the establishment of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, which adopted Islam as its official religion. During this period, religious institutions such as the *penghulu* (spiritual leaders) were established, and mosques and religious activities became more organized. The title "sultan," adopted by Ki Mas Hindi as Sultan Abdurrahman (1662–1706), symbolized the sultanate's commitment to integrating Islamic values into its governance. Even the judicial system during this era was based on the Qur'an.¹¹

The Arab community living in Palembang received special treatment from the sultanate.¹² In addition to being the main trading partners, several Arab figures, such as Sayyid Mustofa Alaidrus, Sayyid Idrus Abdullah Alayidrus, and Sayyid Muhammad Ali Al-Haddad, were appointed as spiritual advisors to the sultanate. Their presence not only strengthened the Islamic missionary network but also played a role in developing Islamic education in Palembang. Historical evidence of this closeness can be seen in the cemetery complex, where several sultans are buried with their spiritual advisors.¹³

The Arab community also established settlements in Palembang's Ulu and Ilir areas, now known as Kampung Arab (Arab Village). These settlements serve as residential areas and as centers for social, religious, and educational activities. Kampung Arab Al-Munawwar and Kampung Arab As-Segaf are examples that continue to preserve their cultural and spiritual heritage to this day.¹⁴

The Arab community's role in Palembang's history is evident in its economic, social, and educational aspects. The Arab community contributed to establishing Islamic educational institutions, which served to educate the younger generation in Islamic teachings, thereby

¹¹ Mizharotul Fuadiyah and Hudaidah, 'Perkembangan Masyarakat Dan Budaya Arab Di Palembang', *Jazirah: Jurnal Peradaban Dan Kebudayaan*, 2.1 (2021) <https://doi.org/10.51190/jazirah.v2i1.19>.

¹² Dewi Setyawati and Yuliarni Yuliarni, 'Pelapisan Sosial Masyarakat Melayu-Jawa Pada Masa Kesultanan Palembang Abad 19', 1.2 (2021), 107–18 <https://doi.org/10.31258/hjps.1.2.107-118>.

¹³ Aan Suriadi and Ida Suryani, 'Kampung Arab Al-Munawar 13 Ulu Palembang Sebagai Sumber Pembelajaran Sejarah Lokal', *Historia Jurnal Program Studi Pendidikan Sejarah*, 7.1 (2019), 45 <https://doi.org/10.24127/hj.v7i1.1575>.

¹⁴ R Purwanti and Balai A S Selatan, 'Pelestarian Kawasan Kampung Arab Almunawar Palembang', 2017, B089–94 <https://doi.org/10.32315/sem.1.b089>.

strengthening the region's religious foundation. Thus, the arrival and development of the Arab community in Palembang have had a significant impact on shaping the city's social and cultural identity and enriching its cultural diversity.¹⁵

2. Social, Religious, Economic, and Traditional Life of the Arab Community in Palembang

a. Social and Religious Life of the Arab Community in Palembang

The Arab community in Palembang, the majority of whom originated from Hadramaut (Yemen), has played a significant role in shaping the social and religious dynamics of the city since its arrival in the 18th and 19th centuries. As a deeply religious community, they successfully strengthened the Islamic identity in the Palembang region through close ties with the sultanate and social interactions with the local population.

1) Relationship with the Sultanate

The Arab community in Palembang established close ties with the Palembang Sultanate, contributing to their regional integration and influence. These relationships were built on shared Islamic values, mutual respect, and the community's role in religious and educational matters. The Arab leaders often served as advisors or religious figures for the sultanate, fostering cooperation in spreading Islamic teachings and strengthening the Islamic identity of Palembang. Their contributions in this context also enhanced their social standing within the broader community.

During the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate era, the Arab community was granted special privileges by the royal court. Based on an interview with a prominent figure from Kampung Al-Munawwar, it was revealed that the Arab community was permitted to establish settlements on land and build trade warehouses. They were also entrusted with important positions as spiritual advisors and imams to the sultan. This close relationship was rooted in shared religious beliefs. Arab figures with extensive knowledge of Islam were deemed capable of leading and guiding the spiritual aspects of the sultanate's

¹⁵ Agus Susilo, Yeni Asmara, and Fitriyan Dela Widyaningrum, 'Kehidupan Masyarakat Etnis Tionghoa Dan Arab Dalam Perspektif Sejarah Perdagangan Di Kota Palembang', *SINDANG: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah Dan Kajian Sejarah*, 5.1 (2023), 1–8 <<https://doi.org/10.31540/sindang.v5i1.1948>>.

administration. An informant stated, "Arab leaders were entrusted with managing religious affairs because they possessed deep religious knowledge." Moreover, some Arab leaders married royal family members, signifying a profound level of integration.¹⁶

These privileges are also evident in the burial sites of the sultans, which are always adjacent to those of their spiritual advisors of Arab descent, such as Habib Abdullah bin Idrus Al-Alydrus, who was buried next to Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I. This fact reflects the great respect the sultanate held for the Arab community.

2) Role in Religious Life

The religiosity of the Arab community in Palembang is evident not only through their adherence to obligatory acts of worship, such as the five daily prayers and fasting during Ramadan but also in their embodiment of Islamic values in daily life. This is mainly reflected in their ethical practices, including dress code, which aligns with Islamic teachings. According to Ali Ahmad Bahsein, the grandson of Habib Alwi Bahsein and Chairman of the Al-Kautsar Foundation, "The importance of dressing according to Islamic principles has been deeply instilled within the community. Although unwritten, this practice of maintaining modesty and covering the aura is consciously upheld by the residents of Kampung Arab, signifying both a tradition and a commitment to respecting religious tenets." This integration of religious principles into cultural and social practices highlights the significant role of the Arab community in sustaining and propagating Islamic values within the sociocultural fabric of Palembang.

The Arab community in Palembang played a pivotal role in shaping the city's religious life. Their deep knowledge of Islam and commitment to religious practices made them influential figures in the spread and reinforcement of Islamic teachings. They established madrasas and Islamic study groups to educate the local population, ensuring that Islamic values were integrated into daily life.

Prominent Arab figures were often appointed as imams, preachers, or religious teachers, guiding the community in matters of worship, law, and spirituality. They also contributed to the introduction and development of Islamic traditions, such as Maulid celebrations and other religious events, which remain a part of Palembang's cultural

¹⁶ Ahmad Rofiq, *Lembaga Pendidikan Masyarakat Arab Palembang Sejarah Perkembangan Dan Perubahan* (Palembang: UIN Raden Fatah Press, 2021).

identity.

In the Arab village community of Palembang, dress ethics are strictly regulated as a manifestation of their commitment to Islamic values. Men are prohibited from wearing shorts or revealing clothing, while women are expected to dress in loose-fitting attire that fully covers their aurat. Ali Ahmad Bahsein, Chairman of the Al-Kautsar Foundation, emphasized that “our dress ethics symbolize our Islamic identity, not only reinforcing our cultural and religious identity but also serving as a model for other communities.”¹⁷ This practice reflects the community’s dedication to preserving religious sanctity and integrating Islamic principles into their daily lives, thereby establishing a distinct sociocultural framework rooted in faith and tradition.

The religiosity of the Arab community in Palembang is prominently reflected in the establishment of *langgar* (small prayer houses) in nearly every residential area, including Kampung Al-Munawwar and Kampung As-Segaf. These *langgar* serve not only as places of worship but also as centers of Islamic learning, playing a pivotal role in shaping the religious foundation of the community. An observation conducted in Kampung As-Segaf highlights the deliberate architectural symbolism of the *langgar*, which faces the Musi River—a historical lifeline and primary transportation route for Palembang. This strategic placement emphasizes the *langgar*’s dual function as a spiritual and communal center, designed to be easily accessible to the broader community. Such integration of religious practices and spatial symbolism demonstrates the Arab community’s significant contribution to the socioreligious landscape of Palembang.¹⁸

The religious traditions of the Arab community in Palembang, such as *Haul*, *Maulid Arbain*, and *Ziarah Qubro*, are meticulously preserved as key components of their spiritual and cultural identity. These traditions commemorate influential Islamic figures and function as effective mediums for *da’wah* (religious propagation), reinforcing the community’s religious values. As stated by Habib Alwi Bahsin, “Our traditions strengthen community solidarity and represent a valuable heritage for future generations.” Observations during a *Maulid Nabi* celebration in Kampung Arab revealed that these events attract participants from various social backgrounds and are enriched

¹⁷ Ali Ahmad Bahsein, Interview with the author, Chairman of the Al-Kautsar Foundation, Palembang, 2024

¹⁸ Purwanti and Selatan.

by Islamic arts, including *gambus*, *hadroh*, and *marawis*. This highlights the dual function of these traditions as instruments of social cohesion and as a means of perpetuating the community's cultural and spiritual legacy for the benefit of subsequent generations.

This steadfast commitment underscores how the Arab community in Palembang not only preserves their ancestral traditions but also exemplifies the seamless integration of Islamic values into daily life. Such integration reflects a dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and religious adherence, showcasing the community's ability to harmonize tradition with the evolving sociocultural landscape. This harmonious approach serves as a model for maintaining cultural identity while fostering inclusivity and adaptability in a diverse societal context.

3) Respect from the Local Community

The local population has long held the Arab community in Palembang in high regard, owing to their significant contributions to religious, educational, and social development. Their role as spiritual leaders, educators, and mediators has solidified their position as respected members of society.

Local respect is also reflected in the integration of Arab traditions into the broader cultural practices of Palembang, such as collaborative participation in religious festivals and events. This mutual respect has fostered a sense of unity and coexistence, strengthening the region's social fabric. The community's commitment to upholding Islamic values and active social welfare participation have further enhanced their standing among the local populace. This respect is not merely symbolic but is embedded in the social interactions and shared traditions that define the relationship between the Arab community and the broader society of Palembang.

The Arab community in Palembang is highly respected by the local population for their contributions to religion and their role in the economy. Many prominent Arab figures belong to the Alawiyyin lineage, which traces its ancestry directly to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, positioning them as esteemed members of society. Interviews reveal that the local community respects their role in spreading Islamic values. Additionally, their success as merchants has established them as vital partners in the economic framework of the sultanate.

The Arab community in Palembang has successfully integrated Islamic values into the local social and cultural fabric. Their close

relationship with the sultanate, contributions to Islamic education, and preservation of religious traditions demonstrate their ability to maintain their identity while enriching the socio-religious dynamics of the region. Through their role, the Arab community in Palembang has become a vital pillar in the development of Islamic civilization in the Indonesian archipelago.¹⁹

3. Educational and Religious Teaching Traditions of the Arab Community

a. Non-Formal Religious Education

It is almost certain that the Arab community in Palembang adheres to Islam. Their initial arrival in Palembang was motivated by the dual purpose of spreading Islamic teachings (*da'wah*) and engaging in trade, with the majority originating from Hadramaut, Yemen. As emphasized in Islamic teachings, the Arab community dramatically values education.

In the early stages of their presence in Palembang, before formal educational institutions such as *madrasahs* or Islamic schools were established, Islamic religious education among the Alawiyyin community was conducted at home or in the *langgar* (prayer houses) they built. Nearly every Arab settlement had a *langgar*, which served as both a center for worship and a venue for religious education. These *langgar* were utilized to teach Islamic knowledge to children within the Arab families and non-Arab children from the surrounding community, reflecting the inclusive and educational role of these prayer houses.

The Arab community in Palembang, predominantly originating from Hadramaut, Yemen, has established Islam as their core identity since their initial arrival in the region. Combining the missions of *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) and commerce, they carried a strong religious ethos, placing Islamic education as a central aspect of their lives. Historically, the Arab traders were renowned as the most prominent linen merchants, with some owning their ships and boats. At the same time, the majority acted as intermediaries connecting local markets to international trade networks. Despite their extensive involvement in commerce, they remained deeply committed to their faith, consistently performing prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and fulfilling other

¹⁹ Aflatun Muchtar and others.

religious obligations. Their religious commitment extended to their socio-economic interactions, as they often supported the sultan, strengthening ties with the royal court. In comparison, the Chinese community in Palembang focused on trading goods such as porcelain, coarse silk, gold thread, iron pots, tea, and medicines imported directly from China. This juxtaposition highlights the distinct economic roles and cultural identities that contributed to the diverse socio-economic fabric of Palembang.²⁰

b. Establishment of Formal Educational Institutions

The educational philosophy of the Arab community is deeply grounded in Islamic teachings, which prioritize the pursuit of knowledge alongside the cultivation of religious values. Education is perceived not solely as a vehicle for intellectual development but as a comprehensive process to instill Islamic morals and ethics. Within this framework, children are systematically taught to read and understand the Quran, master the worship procedures, and internalize Islamic values daily. This holistic approach underscores the community's commitment to integrating intellectual, spiritual, and moral development, thereby shaping individuals who embody the principles of Islamic education in their personal and social lives.

The *langgar* built by the Arab community stands as a symbol of their dedication to preserving the tradition of religious education. Strategically located, often near the banks of the Musi River, these *langgar* reflect meticulous planning to ensure accessibility for the entire community. Beyond serving as a center for Islamic learning, the *langgar* also significantly strengthened social bonds between the Arab community and the local population, fostering harmony within Palembang's diverse cultural and religious landscape.

The education system within the Arab community, initially informal, gradually evolved into a more structured and formalized Model. They began establishing religious schools dedicated to educating their children. In 1907, the Arab community in Palembang initiated a new educational venture by founding *Al-Ihsan* to advance Islamic education and teachings. The establishment of this institution was partly motivated by a strong sense of competition with the Chinese community, which had already established schools earlier. To ensure

²⁰ Kiki A Silaban, 'Peran Bangsa Arab Dalam Perdagangan Antar Benua: Pengaruh Dan Jejak Sejarah Di Indonesia', *Journal of Education and Learning Evaluation*, 1.2 (2024), 188–92 <<https://doi.org/10.57235/arrumman.v1i2.3964>>.

their children's education, the Arab community founded the *Al-Ihsan School*. Seven years later, in 1914, the Arab community in Kampung Arab Al-Munawwar 13 Ulu expanded their educational efforts by establishing *Madrasah Arabiya*. These initiatives reflect the community's commitment to advancing formal Islamic education while addressing the socio-cultural dynamics of their time.²¹

This educational tradition continued to evolve, laying the foundation for establishing formal educational institutions in later years. The founding of *the madrasah* became a significant milestone in expanding access to Islamic religious education and general knowledge for the local community. Integrating Islamic teachings with general subjects became a distinctive feature that set formal education within the Arab community apart from other educational systems. This approach reinforced religious values and equipped students with broader intellectual skills, reflecting a holistic vision of education.

c. Key Figures and Educational Networks

Arab leaders have been instrumental in shaping Islamic education in Palembang, playing a pivotal role in both its establishment and growth. One of the most prominent figures in this regard was Habib Alwi Bahsin, who is widely regarded as a founding father of madrasahs in the region. His leadership and vision were key in transforming madrasahs from mere institutions of learning into powerful centers for the dissemination of Islamic values and knowledge throughout the wider community. Habib Alwi Bahsin's efforts went beyond the mere establishment of schools; he developed a comprehensive educational network that spanned across various districts, ensuring that the teachings of Islam reached a diverse range of social groups, from children to adults.

Under his guidance, madrasahs became central to the cultural and intellectual life of Palembang. They not only provided religious education but also played a crucial role in promoting literacy, moral values, and intellectual discourse. The curriculum developed in these madrasahs was not limited to religious subjects alone; it integrated various fields of knowledge, reflecting the Arab community's commitment to both Islamic teachings and broader academic pursuits. These educational institutions also became spaces where local traditions and Arab-Islamic practices converged, fostering a unique

²¹ Jeroen Peeters, *Kaum Tuo-Kaum Mudo Perubahan Religius Di Palembang 1821-1942* (Jakarta: INIS, 1997).

blend of cultural identities.

The educational networks established by Habib Alwi Bahsin and other key figures ensured the continuity of academic traditions in Palembang. These networks formed the backbone of the Arab community's role as custodians of Islamic moral and intellectual heritage, shaping the city's educational landscape for generations. Over time, these madrasahs became the foundation for a broader cultural movement that was not only religious in nature but also intellectual and educational.

Through the contributions of figures like Habib Alwi Bahsin, religious education in Palembang became deeply ingrained in the fabric of Islamic civilization in the Nusantara. These madrasahs were not simply institutions for religious propagation; they served as the primary means of fostering a well-rounded, educated Muslim community. The legacy of these key figures proves that the Arab community in Palembang was far more than just a group of traders or religious propagators; they were pioneers in the establishment of Islamic education, leaving an indelible mark on the social, cultural, and intellectual development of Palembang. This contribution not only influenced the Arab community but also significantly impacted the broader social dynamics of Palembang, enhancing its position as a vital center of Islamic learning in Southeast Asia.

4. Relationships and Networks of Scholars and Arab Leaders in Palembang

a. **The Role of Scholars in the Sultanate and Society**

The Arab *ulama* in Palembang played a central role in strengthening the Islamic foundation of the Sultanate and its society, serving as spiritual advisors to the sultan and royal family while actively influencing religious policies. Sheikh Abdus Shamad Al-Palimbani, a prominent figure in the 18th century, was instrumental in internalizing Islam in Palembang and the broader Nusantara. Renowned for his expertise in *tasawwuf* (Islamic mysticism), he shaped the character of Palembang society into one that embraced humanistic and inclusive values.²² His contributions enriched the local religious and intellectual landscape and left a lasting legacy in the Islamic world,

²² Tita Amalia and Hudaidah Hudaidah, 'Peranan Syekh Abdoes Shamad Al-Palimbani Sebagai Ulama Bebas Dalam Proses Internalisasi Islam Di Palembang', *Fajar Historia: Jurnal Ilmu Sejarah Dan Pendidikan*, 6.1 (2022), 128–40 <<https://doi.org/10.29408/fhs.v6i1.5486>>.

establishing Palembang as a vital center for Islamic scholarship and culture.²³

Within the royal court, Arab *ulama* were frequently appointed as grand imams and prayer leaders, reflecting their close ties to the ruling authority. This relationship established a mutually beneficial dynamic, where the *ulama* gained a platform to influence religious and moral policies. At the same time, Sultanate's governance, the rulers benefited from their guidance in ensuring that administrative practices aligned with Islamic principles.²⁴ In this context, the *ulama* functioned as educators and intermediaries, bridging Islamic values with the implementation of just and ethical governance practices.

At the community level, *ulama* played a vital role in establishing robust *da'wah* networks that united the community through religious teachings and the establishment of religious institutions such as *langgar* and *madrasah*. These institutions served as effective centers for learning and *da'wah*, catering not only to the Arab community but also to the broader local population. The interaction between *ulama* and the local society fostered harmony grounded in Islamic values, evident in traditions such as *ziarah* (pilgrimage to sacred sites) and other religious activities that engage various community segments.²⁵

Furthermore, the presence of Arab *ulama* in Palembang significantly contributed to developing the community's culture and identity. They introduced Islamic teachings and integrated Arab culture with local traditions, resulting in a rich and diverse acculturation. This influence is evident in various aspects of society, including art, music, and religious traditions that are still practiced today. Thus, the role of the Arab *ulama* in Palembang extended beyond religious matters, encompassing interconnected social, cultural, and political dimensions that shaped the region's unique identity.

b. Networks of Scholars and Their Lasting Impact

The scholarly network established by Habib Alwi Bahsin in Palembang, through *da'wah* and education, has significantly

²³ Muhammad Adil, 'Fikih Melayu Nusantara Masa Kesultanan Palembang Darussalam', *AHKAM : Jurnal Ilmu Syariah*, 18.2 (2018) <<https://doi.org/10.15408/ajis.v18i2.9649>>.

²⁴ Rudy Kurniawan, 'The Ulama of Palembang Sammaniyah Order: Survival in The Middle of The Regime of Power in The 20th Century', *Theological Studies*, 78.1 (2022) <<https://journals.co.za/doi/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7564>>.

²⁵ Dewi Fatonah, 'Hadith Practices in Ziarah Kubrā Tradition in Palembang Arabian Village', *Jurnal Living Hadis*, 6.1 (2021), 135 <<https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2021.2354>>.

contributed to the development of Islamic educational institutions in the city, particularly within the Arab community. This legacy is reflected in the establishing of various institutions, such as *madrasahs*, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), and social foundations providing formal education for orphans. These institutions, especially those located in the Ulu Palembang area, demonstrate the direct and indirect influence of Habib Alwi Bahsin's dedication to building an education system that not only instills Islamic values but also strengthens social solidarity within the Arab community of Palembang. To this day, his contributions are recognized as a cornerstone in advancing *da'wah* and Islamic education in the region.

The network of Arab *ulama* in Palembang not only thrived during the Sultanate era but has also persisted into modern times, creating a legacy that continues to flourish today. One of the most significant contributions of this *ulama* is the establishment of educational institutions, such as Darul Aitam and Madrasah Al-Kautsar. These institutions serve as centers of learning and hubs for shaping Islamic character among the younger generation. Darul Aitam, for instance, was founded to provide education for orphans, reflecting the *ulama's* commitment to social justice and the empowerment of underprivileged communities. Madrasah Al-Kautsar, established by prominent figures like Habib Alwi Bahsin, stands as a testament to the enduring scholarly tradition within the Arab community of Palembang, symbolizing their dedication to preserving and transmitting Islamic knowledge.²⁶

The network of Arab *ulama* in Palembang experienced significant growth due to the central role of Habib Alwi Bahsin, affectionately known as "Muallim Nang." As an agent of change, he not only established and developed Islamic educational institutions, particularly *madrasah*, but also expanded his *da'wah* to various regions in South Sumatra, including Lintang, Pagar Alam, Tanjung Sakti, Pendopo, Pulau Bangka, and even Bengkulu Province. His *da'wah* was conducted strategically, supported by his students, who became part of an effective cadre-building process.

According to an interview with Ali Ahmad Bahsein, the grandson of Muallim Nang and Chairman of the Al-Kautsar Foundation, the *da'wah* and educational legacy initiated by Muallim Nang has made

²⁶ Bety Bety and others, 'Cultural Reproduction of The Jawi Book in The Recitation Tradition in Palembang', *Khazanah Sosial*, 5.4 (2023), 636–46 <<https://doi.org/10.15575/ks.v5i4.22677>>.

a substantial contribution to strengthening the network of *ulama* and Islamic academic institutions in Palembang. This network not only fortified *da'wah* within the Arab community but also produced a new generation of leaders dedicated to upholding Islamic values and establishing relevant educational institutions that continue to thrive today.

This network of *ulama* established a continuity of educational traditions, wherein the Islamic values they taught have been passed down through generations. Subsequent generations carry on this legacy, preserving the existence and relevance of Islamic education in Palembang. Through these educational institutions, Arab *ulama* has successfully built a system that strengthens faith and empowers the community intellectually and socially, ensuring the sustainability of their contributions to society.²⁷ Studies indicate that Islamic education in these institutions plays a vital role in shaping students' character by integrating moral and spiritual values into their curricula. This approach ensures that education fosters intellectual growth and cultivates ethical and spiritual development, preparing students to become well-rounded individuals who contribute positively to society.²⁸

Moreover, the educational institutions established by Arab *ulama* in Palembang have substantially contributed to developing local culture and identity. These institutions integrated academic knowledge with character education and social values, ensuring relevance to the sociocultural context of the Palembang community. The network of Arab *ulama* thus played a transformative role in disseminating Islamic teachings and cultivating a civilized and equitable society. This dual contribution is further reflected in the social initiatives they pioneered, which underscore their commitment to holistic community empowerment and cultural enrichment.

Overall, the role of Arab *ulama* in education in Palembang illustrates how they have created a sustainable legacy that emphasizes not only the spiritual dimension but also social and cultural aspects, thereby significantly impacting the region's development.

²⁷ Yahya Obaid and others, 'Revealing Identity to Form Student Character: Application of the Hidden Curriculum in Islamic Legal Education', *Samarah Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 8.3 (2024), 1782 <<https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i3.24061>>.

²⁸ Ainawa Kholilatul Nurizah and Muhlasin Amrullah, 'Religious Character Formation Through Islamic Habituation in Primary Education', *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 12.4 (2024) <<https://doi.org/10.21070/ijis.v12i4.1741>>.

Table. 1 Summary of Findings on the Role of the Arab Community in Palembang (From the 17th Century to the Present)

No.	Category	Findings	Impact
1	Arrival and Growth of the Arab Community	Arab community arrived in the 7th century via trade routes, established settlements, and strengthened Islamic education and culture.	Laid the foundation for Islamization and cultural diversity in Palembang.
2	Social and Religious	Played a vital role in shaping Palembang's Islamic identity through social integration and religious activities.	Enhanced the socio-religious fabric of Palembang.
3	Role in the Sultanate	Arab leaders were spiritual advisors to the Sultan, held prestigious roles, and were influential in governance.	Strengthened Islamic governance and social cohesion.
4	Religious Contributions	Established madrasahs, langgars, and study groups, integrated Islamic principles into daily life.	Built a strong religious foundation and preserved Islamic identity.
5	Cultural Contributions	Introduced Islamic traditions, art, and music, merging them with local culture to form a rich acculturation.	Created a unique and diverse cultural identity in the region.
6	Non-Formal Education	Initial education conducted in langgars and homes, focusing on Quranic and religious studies for children.	Established inclusivity in religious education for Arab and non-Arab communities.
7	Formal Educational Institutions	Founded Al-Ihsan in 1907 and Madrasah Arabiya in 1914, formalizing education with integrated Islamic and general curricula.	Improved access to structured education and advanced Islamic knowledge.

No.	Category	Findings	Impact
8	Key Figures and Networks	Habib Alwi Bahsin played a central role in building networks, expanding education, and spreading Islamic teachings.	Strengthened Islamic networks and produced future leaders in education and religion.
9	Lasting Legacy	Established sustainable educational traditions, empowered communities intellectually and socially, and left a lasting sociocultural impact.	Preserved Islamic values and fostered a civilized and equitable society.

Source: Observations, interviews, and literature review on the history and contributions of the Arab community in Palembang.

Conclusion

The Arab community played an important role in the development of Palembang since their arrival in the 7th century, driven by both trade and the spread of Islam. In the 17th century, with the establishment of the Palembang Darussalam Sultanate, the Arab community’s influence grew significantly in both religious and governmental aspects, as they were appointed as spiritual advisors to the sultan and involved in shaping a legal system based on Islam. They also made significant contributions to education by founding madrasahs and langgars as centers for religious education, serving both the Arab community and the local population. Furthermore, they were granted privileges by the sultanate, such as the right to establish settlements and engage in trade, which further strengthened their integration into Palembang’s social and economic structure. Their influence was not limited to the propagation of Islamic teachings, but also extended to education, social, and cultural fields, creating a legacy that continues to impact the social and cultural development of Palembang today, establishing the Arab community as pioneers in building a rich Islamic identity in the region.

Overall, this work presents a thorough and insightful examination of the role of Habib Alwi Bahsin and the Arab ulama in shaping Islamic education in Palembang. By incorporating additional critical

perspectives and comparative analyses, it could provide an even more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their lasting legacy.

The study reveals that the Arab community's contributions have transcended religious propagation to encompass broader social, cultural, and educational dimensions, ensuring their relevance and influence in Palembang's historical and contemporary development.

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