



TRANSLATING TAWHĪD:

Chinese *Tapekong* in a Sundanese Islamic Manuscript¹

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Abstract: This study examines how a Sundanese Muslim scholar, Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh of Cianjur (1879–1966), employed the Chinese term *tapekong*, referring to the deity Tua Pek Kong venerated in Chinese temples, as an antithetical reference to Islamic monotheism (*tawhīd*) in his Sundanese Pegon translation and commentary (*sharh*) of the *'Aqīdat al-'awām*, a foundational creedal poem by Aḥmad al-Marzūqī (d. 1846). The central question is: Why did the translator choose a Chinese religious referent, rather than other non-Islamic traditions, to concretize *shirk* (polytheism), the theological antithesis of *tawhīd*? Drawing on philological analysis of the manuscript and the scholarly framework of Islamic vernacularization, this study argues that the use of *tapekong* constitutes a deliberate act of theological localization. It transformed *tawhīd* from an abstract doctrinal category into a socially embedded marker of communal identity, reflecting the multicultural milieu of the twentieth-century Sundanese community, particularly the Priangan region, where Chinese temples (*kelenteng*) represented the most visible form of religious alterity. This finding contributes to the study of Islamic theology in Southeast Asia by demonstrating how vernacular translations actively shape, not merely transmit, theological understanding through culturally situated rhetorical strategies.

Keywords: Sundanese Islam, *'Aqīdat al-'awām*, *Tawhīd*, Vernacularization, *Tapekong*, Chinese-Muslim Encounter.

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Introduction

WHAT HAPPENS when a Muslim scholar translates the concept of Islamic theology (*tawhīd*) into a local language? The question may seem straightforward, yet it reveals how theological knowledge travels from one linguistic tradition to another. This article amplifies the understanding that the translation of religious texts invariably involves rhetorical choices that reflect the social, cultural, and political context of the translator.

To address this question, the article draws upon the theoretically rich framework of vernacularization. Sheldon Pollock, in his works,² defines vernacularization as a historical process through which local languages replaced cosmopolitan languages (Sanskrit and Latin) as the medium of literary and political expression. Adapting Pollock's framework to the Islamic context in South and Southeast Asia, Ronit Ricci demonstrates that the translation of Islamic texts from Arabic into local languages (Javanese, Malay, Tamil) constituted a space where the "Arabic cosmopolis" encountered local knowledge systems, producing culturally distinctive forms of Islam.³ In the specific Malay-Indonesian context, the concept was significantly developed by Anthony H. Johns, who argued that the participation of Southeast Asian Muslims in global Islamic civilization must be seen through their active role in "the transmission, development and vernacularization of the Islamic disciplines," as demonstrated by scholars from Hamzah Fansuri to 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Sinkīlī (d. 1693).⁴

Recent scholarship has reinforced and expanded this argument. Johanna Pink analyzes how the voices of local

² Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006); Sheldon Pollock, "The Cosmopolitan Vernacular," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 1 (1998): 6–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2659022>.

³ Ronit Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁴ Anthony H. Johns, "Islamization in Southeast Asia: Reflections and Reconsiderations with Special Reference to the Role of Sufism," *Southeast Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (1993): 43–61, https://doi.org/10.20495/tak.31.1_43.

Indonesian scholars (*kiai*) served as mediums for the vernacularization of the Quran in Java,⁵ while Jajang A. Rohmana has prolifically mapped the development of Quranic studies in the Sundanese context of West Java, including its poetic traditions.⁶ Most recently, Ade Kosasih et al. drew on Islamic manuscripts in a vernacularized Arabic script (Pegon) authored by Kiai Tubagus Ahmad Bakri of Purwakarta (Mama Sempur, d. 1975), employing a decolonial framework to examine the vernacularization of Islamic theology within the Sundanese *pesantren*⁷ tradition.⁸ The use of the Pegon script, much like Jawi in the Malay world, represents a distinctive form of vernacularization in the island of Java, where Arabic texts were rendered through interlinear translation or in the form of commentary (*sharḥ*) to facilitate comprehension among students (*santri*) and the public who had not yet mastered Arabic.⁹

⁵ Johanna Pink, "The Kyai's Voice and the Arabic Qur'an; Translation, Orality, and Print in Modern Java," *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* 21, no. 3 (October 2020), <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v21i3.948>.

⁶ Jajang A. Rohmana, "Metrical Verse as a Rule of Qur'anic Translation: Some Reflections on R.A.A. Wiranatakoesoemah's Soerat Al-Baqarah (1888–1965)," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 53, no. 2 (December 2015): 439–67, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2015.532.439-467>; Jajang A. Rohmana, "Sundanese Translations of the Quran in West Java: Characteristics and the Limits of Translation," *Dinika: Academic Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (December 2019): 165–200, <https://doi.org/10.22515/dinika.v4i2.1713>.

⁷ The *pesantren* is a residential Islamic seminary in Indonesia in which the religious knowledge taught is generally drawn from classical texts spanning various disciplines, composed in both Arabic and local languages. These references are collectively known as the *kitab kuning* (lit. "yellow books") tradition. See Martin van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning: Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu: Comments on a New Collection in the KITLV Library," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 146, no. 2/3 (1990): 226–69.

⁸ Ade Kosasih et al., "Decolonizing Islamic Theology through the Vernacularization of Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah in Kh. Tubagus Ahmad Bakri's Pegon-Sundanese Manuscripts," *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, November 28, 2025, 815–22, <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i3.2496>.

⁹ Henri Chambert-Loir, *Sadur: Sejarah Terjemahan Di Indonesia Dan Malaysia* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2009); Philipp Bruckmayr, "The Šarḥ/Ḥāšiya Phenomenon in Southeast Asia," *Midéo. Mélanges De L'institut Dominicain D'études Orientales*, no. 32 (May 2017): 32; Sidney Jones, "Arabic Instruction and Literacy in Javanese Muslim Schools," *International Journal of the*

Nevertheless, the majority of studies on Islamic vernacularization in the Malay world have focused on the translation of the Quran and the transmission of religious terminology. Zuhri, in his study of Islamic theological terms in nineteenth-century Javanese literature,¹⁰ argues that vernacularization functioned as a tool of knowledge transmission in which the substance, meaning, and content remained unchanged. This finding is important for challenging the syncretism thesis that has long dominated the study of Javanese Islam.¹¹ However, the conclusion that vernacularization served merely as a transmissive tool for Islamic knowledge warrants reconsideration.

This article proposes the argument that vernacularization is not always conservative, yet it can also be creative and transformative. To consider this argument, the paper examines a case that has not previously been discussed in the academic literature: the use of the term *tapekong*, referring to the deity Tua Pek Kong venerated in Chinese temples (*kelenteng*), by Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh of Cianjur (d. 1966), a *pesantren* scholar who was also a Sundanese aristocrat (*ménak*). He did so while transforming the text of the *'Aqīdat al-'awām* (The Creed for the Laypeople), a seminal work on Islamic theology by Aḥmad al-Marzūqī (d. 1846), a leading Mālikī scholar in Mecca, from the genre of Arabic

Sociology of Language, no. 42 (1983): 83–94, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.1983.42.83>. Beyond existing scholarship, an ongoing project entitled “Textual Microcosms,” directed by Ronit Ricci, also merits attention. A special issue of the *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3, 2025, showcases the project’s contributions to exploring translation traditions practiced across various regions, including Southeast Asia, Turkey, and the East African coast.

¹⁰ H. Zuhri, “Beyond Syncretism: Evidence of the Vernacularization of Islamic Theological Terms in Javanese Literature in the 19th Century,” *Al-Jami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, no. 2 (November 2022): 373–98, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2022.602.373-398>.

¹¹ See, for example, Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976); Koentjaraningrat, *Javanese Culture* (Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); cf. Al Makin, “Unearthing Nusantara’s Concept of Religious Pluralism: Harmonization and Syncretism in Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic Classical Texts,” *Al-Jami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 54, no. 1 (June 2016): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2016.541.1-30>.

didactic poetry (*naẓm*) into Sundanese poetry (*nadoman*). In the endnotes accompanying his translation, Muhammad Nuh explicitly cited *tapekong* as a concrete example of polytheistic practice (*shirk*), the antonym of Islamic monotheism (*tawhīd*) that forms the doctrinal core of the 'Aqīdat al-'awām. This choice is crucial because al-Marzūqī himself, in his original text, made no mention of any specific cultural referent to illustrate *shirk*.

This *nadoman* demonstrates that the vernacularization of theology involves not only linguistic negotiation between Arabic and the local language, but also a cultural negotiation involving “the others,” in this case, Chinese religious traditions. This vernacular work stands as an important marker of the presence of the Chinese community and its religiosity, which had been part of the Sundanese Muslims’ lived experience.

The study of Islam-China relations and Chinese communities in Indonesia has been predominantly approached from socio-political, economic, and cultural assimilation perspectives. For example, foundational works such as Mely G. Tan’s sociological study highlight the social and cultural accommodation of the Chinese in the Sundanese region.¹² Furthermore, Muhamad Ali examines the history of Chinese Muslims across colonial and postcolonial Indonesia,¹³ while Sumanto Al Qurtuby traces the legacy of Cheng Ho and Chinese Muslims in the Archipelago.¹⁴ What remains largely unexplored, however, is the theological dimension of this encounter, particularly how the presence of the Chinese community and its religious practices were read and positioned within local Islamic religious discourse. This article addresses that gap by demonstrating how a Sundanese *pesantren* scholar engaged with Chinese religious symbols not through

¹² Mely G. Tan, *The Chinese of Sukabumi: A Study of Social and Cultural Accommodation*, 2nd edition (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2025).

¹³ Muhamad Ali, “Chinese Muslims in Colonial and Postcolonial Indonesia,” *Explorations: A Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 7, no. 1 (2007): 1–22.

¹⁴ Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Sino-Indo Muslim Cultures: Tracing the History and Legacy of Cheng Ho and Chinese Muslims in Nusantara,” *Islam Nusantara: Journal for the Study of Islamic History and Culture* 7, no. 1 (2026): 27–47, <https://doi.org/10.47776/islamnusantara.v7i1.1857>.

direct socio-political confrontation but through the internal logic of Islamic theology.

Drawing on philological analysis of the manuscript and a historical-sociological reading of inter-ethnic dynamics between Sundanese and Chinese communities, this article seeks to answer the question: Why did the translator choose a Chinese religious referent to concretize *shirk* (polytheism), the theological antithesis of *tawhīd*? The article argues that the use of *tapekong* constitutes evidence that the vernacularization of Islamic theology in Sundanese *pesantren* was far more than a linguistic practice. It was a process of cultural negotiation that grounded abstract theological concepts in concrete social realities, including the multi-ethnic reality involving the presence of the Chinese community and their religious practices. Through this analysis, the article identifies this translation practice as “theological localization.”

The Manuscript and its Translator

To understand why the term *tapekong* appeared in an Islamic theological text, one must first explore two intertwined contexts, namely the source text and the scholar who translated it. The two cannot be separated, for a translation is always the product of a dialogue between the original text and the translator’s world.

The *‘Aqīdat al-‘awām* is an Arabic didactic poem (*naẓm*) composed by Aḥmad al-Marzūqī, an Egyptian scholar who studied at al-Azhar University in Cairo before spending his intellectual career and the remainder of his life in Mecca. The text presents the fundamental doctrines of Islamic theology, known in the Javanese tradition as *‘aqā’id séket* (the fifty articles of creed), which encompasses twenty essential (*wājib*) and twenty impossible (*mustahīl*) attributes of God, four *wājib* and four *mustahīl* attributes of the Prophets, and one possible (*jā’iz*) attribute each for God and the Prophets. It also includes additional teachings on faith in angels (*malā’ikah*) and revealed scriptures (*kitāb*), as well as a brief account of the Prophet Muhammad’s life. The entire work is composed in fifty-seven verses in the *rajaz* meter (*baḥr*). Regarding the history of its composition, al-Marzūqī himself acknowledges in his own commentary (*sharḥ*), the *Taḥṣīl nayl al-marām*, that he began composing the work in 1258 AH (1842 AD) following

guidance from the Prophet Muhammad received in a dream, a claim that may be read as an established strategy of legitimation within the tradition of Islamic scholarship.¹⁵

Containing the core principles of Sunni Ash'arite *tawhīd*, the work was received and vernacularized far beyond the Arab heartlands, including in East Africa.¹⁶ In the context of Southeast Asian Islam, while staying in Mecca, Muḥammad Nawawī of Banten (d. 1897), a prominent scholar from the Malay world, responded to the work by composing an Arabic *sharḥ* entitled *Nūr al-ẓalām*. Moreover, beyond its circulation in handwritten manuscript form,¹⁷ the growing popularity of print culture made al-Marzūqī's text a mandatory part of the introductory Islamic theology curriculum in numerous *pesantren* across Indonesia.¹⁸ This intellectual tradition inspired local scholars to produce translations in the various languages understood by their audiences,¹⁹ including Sundanese, among them the version by Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh of Cianjur, West Java, who is the subject of this article.

¹⁵ Mimi Hanaoka, ed., *Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: Persian Histories from the Peripheries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 70–98. This convention also found in various Malay *hikayat* writing traditions. See: Vladimir I. Braginsky, *The Heritage of Traditional Malay Literature: A Historical Survey of Genres, Writings and Literary Views* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Alessandra Vianello, Lidwien Kapteijns, and Mohamed Kassim, "'Stringing Coral Beads': The Religious Poetry of Brava (c. 1890-1975): A Source Publication of Chimiini Texts and English Translations," in *"Stringing Coral Beads": The Religious Poetry of Brava (c. 1890-1975)* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2018), 190–211.

¹⁷ Several digital manuscript databases, such as the Digital Repository of Endangered and Affected Manuscripts in Southeast Asia (DREAMSEA) and the Endangered Archives Program (EAP), document the distribution of this text in several regions of Indonesia, such as Aceh, Sijunjung (West Sumatra), Palembang (South Sumatra), Gresik (East Java), and Tuban (East Java).

¹⁸ van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning."

¹⁹ Kawashima Midori et al., eds., *Catalogue of Southeast Asian Kitabs of Sophia University: Third and Expanded Edition*, vol. 8 (Japan: Sophia University, 2025).

The biography and selected ideas of Muhammad Nuh are briefly recorded in the work *Lenyepaneun* compiled by Abubakar.²⁰ As indicated by the titles, “Raden” and “Haji,”²¹ he was both a descendant of the Sundanese aristocracy (*ménak*) and of *pesantren* scholars. His lineage can be traced back to Raden Aria Wiratanu I (Dalem Cikundul), the founder of the Cianjur regency, through a genealogy spanning several generations of regents and religious scholars.²² Unlike Javanese culture, where the aristocratic class (*priyayi*) was often distanced from the *pesantren* tradition,²³ the Sundanese *ménak* maintained an organic closeness to the *pesantren* milieu.²⁴ Muhammad Nuh studied at several *pesantren* in the Priangan region before joining the Malay-Haramayn network that Azyumardi Azra has termed the *Aṣḥāb al-Jāwīyīn*.²⁵ During his five years in Mecca, he studied under several prominent scholars, most notably Muhammad Mukhtar ibn Atarid of Bogor (d. 1930), a fellow *ménak* scholar who had been teaching there for nearly 30

²⁰ R. N. Abubakar, ed., *Lenyepaneun: Kumpulan Piwejang-Piwejang R.H. Mh. Nuh Nalika Masih Keneh Jumeneng Dina Pangaosan Madrasah Kaum Cianjur* (Yayasan Perguruan Islam Al-I'ānah: Cianjur, n.d.). See also Budi Utomo, “Pemikiran KH.R. Muhammad Nuh Bin Idris Terhadap Ideologi Wahhabi Dalam Kitab Al-Ajwibat Syafiyah Li Dzawil 'Uqulis Salimah Dan Kontribusinya Pada Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama” (PhD Thesis, Universitas Wahid Hasyim, 2025); Nunu A. Hamijaya, *KH.R. Muhammad Nuh bin Idris: Pendiri Madrasah Al I'ānah Cianjur (Ulama, Muqoddam Tijani, Advisuur SI Dan Politisi Masjoemi)* (Pusbangter, 2025).

²¹ *Raden* is a noble title commonly used within the Sundanese aristocratic tradition.

²² Bayu Surianingrat, *Sajarah Cianjur Sareng Raden Aria Wira Tanu Dalem Cikundul Cianjur* (Jakarta: Rukun Warga Cianjur, 1982), 152; Ismail Syakban and Muchlis Muchlis, “Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam KHR. Abdullah Bin Nuh,” *Tajdid: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman Dan Kemanusiaan* 5, no. 1 (April 2021): 47, <https://doi.org/10.52266/tajdid.v5i1.629>.

²³ Merle Calvin Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries* (EastBridge, 2006), 18.

²⁴ Nina Herlina Lubis, *Kehidupan Kaum Ménak Priangan, 1800–1942* (Bandung: Pusat Informasi Kebudayaan Sunda, 1998), 267.

²⁵ Azyumardi Azra, “The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesian ‘Ulama’ in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries” (PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1992).

years.²⁶ Their meeting represented more than a mere intellectual encounter, as the two men were also bound by ties of kinship.²⁷ This intellectual trajectory enabled Muhammad Nuh to connect not only with the Sundanese scholarly network but more broadly with the regional networks of the Malay Southeast Asian world and beyond.²⁸

This capital provided him the authority and confidence to engage in social, political, and intellectual activities after he returned from the Holy Land. As also documented in the *Lenyepaneun*, in 1912, Muhammad Nuh established a *pesantren* which he named “Madrasah Al-I’anah,” which remains active to this day. That same work also records his engagement in social and political life: he was elected a member of the Constituent Assembly (*Majelis Konstituante*) in post-independence Indonesia through the Masyumi Party.

As an Islamic scholar, Muhammad Nuh’s intellectual contributions extended beyond the Sundanese Muslim community to a regional level. This is evidenced by his composition of a Sunni jurisprudential work in the question-and-answer format entitled *Al-Ajwibat al-shāfiyah li dhawī al-‘uqūl al-sālīmah*. Its use of Malay and its publication in Batavia (today: Jakarta) indicate that the text was intended for an audience broader than the Sundanese-speaking community. The other work, *Risālat al-qiblah*, a guide for calculating the direction of prayer (*qiblah*), goes even further: it was written in four languages (Arabic, Sundanese, Malay, and Javanese), suggesting that Muhammad Nuh was a figure of

²⁶ Jajang A. Rohmana, “Diskursus Tasawuf Nusantara Di Mekah: Respons Mukhtār ‘Atārid Al-Bughūrī Terhadap Ajaran Martabat Tujuh,” *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 19, no. 1 (July 2021): 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v19i1.923>.

²⁷ Jajang A. Rohmana, “Sundanese ‘Kitāb’ Printed in Early-Twentieth-Century Egypt as Evidence of Islamic Transregional Networks,” *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* 26, no. 2 (April 2025): 197–98, <https://doi.org/10.17510/wacana.v26i2.1779>; See also: Abubakar, *Lenyepaneun: Kumpulan Piwejang-Piwejang R.H. Mh. Nuh Nalika Masih Keneh Jumeneng Dina Pangaosan Madrasah Kaum Cianjur*, 4.

²⁸ Ginanjar Sya’ban, “Naskah Kifāyah Al-Mubtadi’în Karya Syaikh Mukhtar Bogor (1862-1930) Dan Kontribusinya Dalam Sejarah Intelektual Ulama Sunda Di Makkah Abad XX M: Kajian Teks Dan Konteks” (PhD Thesis, Universitas Padjadjaran, 2022).

considerable standing in both the global and local Islamic scholarly landscape.

Another work that further consolidated his authority as an Islamic scholar is his reception of al-Marzūqī's theological text, the 'Aqīdat al-'awām, which forms the primary focus of this article. It comprises three textual layers connected to each other: the original Arabic *nazm* of the 'Aqīdat al-'awām, a verse-by-verse translation into Sundanese *nadoman* poetry, and a set of endnotes with a numbering system linking them to specific verses.

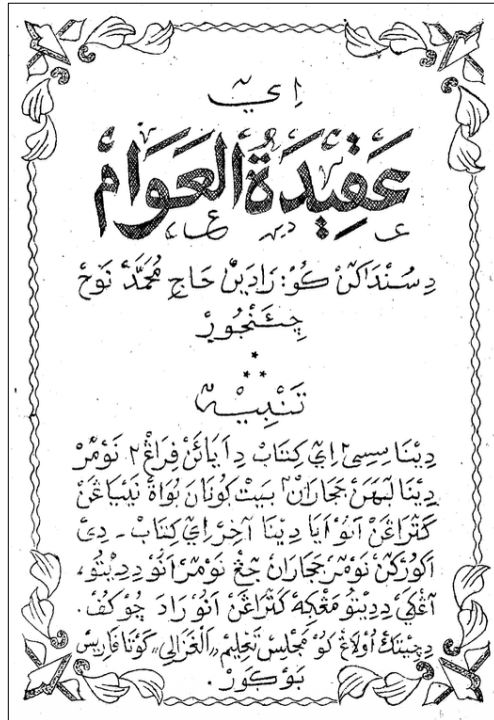


Figure 1. Cover page of the Sundanese 'Aqīdat al-'awām by Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh

Muhammad Nuh crafted the vernacular version of this work in Sundanese with considerable creativity, not only in his use of the Pegon script but also in his transformation of the textual form from Arabic poetry into the local poetic genre. On the cover page (Figure 1), the title is inscribed as: "Ieu 'Aqīdat al-'awām disundakeun ku: Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh Cianjur" (This is the 'Aqīdat al-'awām rendered into Sundanese by Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh of

Cianjur), with an attribution that explicitly names the translator along with his aristocratic title (Raden) and geographical affiliation (Cianjur), elements that served to strengthen the authority of the text.

It is also important to note that Muhammad Nuh included a separate segment entitled “*Sababna Ngarang ‘Aqīdat al-‘awām*” (The Historical Background of the Composition of ‘*Aqīdat al-‘awām*), the content of which amplifies al-Marzūqī’s spiritual experience in composing the work. Here it becomes evident that, despite displaying his aristocratic title, Muhammad Nuh nevertheless anchored his religious authority to a stronger and more widely recognized chain. Similarly, regarding his choice to translate the text into *nadoman*, in this section Muhammad Nuh also affirms that he rendered the text into Sundanese while preserving the original Arabic prosodic conventions.

This section also contains a statement of considerable significance for the study of Islamic vernacularization. Here, Muhammad Nuh consciously explains his motivation for the translation. He states that the text was intended for “Sundanese people who do not understand Arabic” (*mudah-mudahan manfaat ka urang Sunda anu henteu ngahartos kana bahasa Arab*), a declaration that explicitly identifies his target readership as ordinary Sundanese who lacked direct access to Arabic texts. This motivation is commonly found in vernacular texts, paralleling, for instance, the approach of Muhammad Salih Darat of Semarang (d. 1903) in composing *Minhāj al-atqiyā’*, a Javanese translation of the Sufi work *Hidayat al-adhiyā’* by an Indian scholar, Zayn al-Dīn al-Malibārī (d. 1522).

The primary source employed in this study is essentially a handwritten manuscript, the digital version of which is widely available on the internet. However, its cover bears a note indicating that it was reprinted by “Majelis Taklim Al-Ghazali, Kota Paris, Bogor.” It is important to note that this publishing house was an Islamic institution founded by Haji Raden Abdullah (d. 1987), Muhammad Nuh’s son. At first glance, this publishing initiative may seem unremarkable, given that he was reprinting

his own father's work. However, Martin van Bruinessen²⁹ identifies Abdullah as a figure deeply committed to the publication of Islamic works in Sundanese, particularly the writings of Imām al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). These initiatives confirm a continuity in the transmission of the Islamic vernacularization tradition in the Sundanese region, particularly through the line established by Muhammad Nuh, while also illustrating the prolific printing tradition of Islamic texts in this area.³⁰ Although historically significant, this translation is no longer actively taught either in the *pesantren* affiliated with his descendants or within the family itself.³¹

Codicologically, the manuscript displays a bilingual format characteristic of the *sharḥ* tradition in Indonesian *pesantren*. Each page features al-Marzūqī's original Arabic poetry in the *rajaz* meter, followed by a verse-by-verse Sundanese translation also arranged in *nadoman* form with the same meter. This points to a distinctive vernacularization strategy in which Arabic poetic prosody was fully applied within the Sundanese poetic tradition; Muhammad Nuh paid meticulous attention to the correspondence of rhyme patterns as well.³²

The most distinctive feature of this manuscript is its extensive endnote system, which functions as a paratext³³ linking the main

²⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, dan Tarekat* (Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012), 258. Beyond Islamic works, Abdullah was also among those who actively supported the publication of local historical texts, including the *Babad Cianjur* by Nyai Mas Syarifah Didoh. See: Ilham Nurwansah, ed., *Babad Cianjur Karya Nyai Mas Syarifah Didoh (1974)* (Bandung: Kairaga Institute, 2025), 35.

³⁰ Asep Saefullah, "The Tradition of Religious Books (Kitabs) Printing: Case Study of the Production and Reproduction of Religious Books (Kitabs) in Cianjur and Sukabumi, West Java, Indonesia," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 17, no. 2 (2019): 291–320, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v17i2.718>.

³¹ Interview with Kiai Pupung Furqon Supardan, descendant representative of Muhammad Nuh, May 1, 2026.

³² Mutakin, "Naskah Tentang Isra' Mi'raj dalam Bentuk Nadoman," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 11, no. 1 (2013): 1, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlk.v11i1.68>; Titin Nurhayati Ma'mun, "Pengaruh Syair Arab Terhadap Pola Syi'iran Di Jawa Barat," *Panggung* 24, no. 3 (2014): 211–23.

³³ Paratext is defined as the elements that "surround" and "extend" the main text, including endnotes, serving as a threshold between the text and its reader.

text to its context. Muhammad Nuh wrote specifically about the function of this feature on three separate occasions. This repetition signals the great importance the translator attached to this section for his pedagogical purposes. On the first two pages, the explanation appears under a dedicated Arabic heading, *tanbīh* (caution). At the end of the translation, the description is placed under a Pegon script heading, *keterangan* (notes). All three passages share the same essence, indicating the vital role of this paratextual apparatus. However, unlike the *tanbīh* sections, whose wording is identical, the *keterangan* reads as follows:

Original Sundanese Version	English Translation
<i>Di dieu diterangkeun sakur kalimat atawa basa anu hésé dihartikeunana serta make dinomeran. Ieu nomer diakurkeun jeung nomer anu aya dina pabeneran hiji-hiji bait (jajaran).</i>	Here, only those sentences or expressions that are difficult to translate will be explained, and they are numbered as well. These numbers correspond to the numbers in the translation of each verse (arranged line by line).

It was within these annotations that Muhammad Nuh transcended the role of translator and assumed the function of a commentator (*shāriḥ*). Beyond providing explanations, this paratextual apparatus became the arena that displayed the most striking instance of theological localization: the use of the Chinese term *tapekong* in the interpretation of the doctrine of *tawhīd*.

Chinese in the Sundanese Context

Muhammad Nuh's choice of *tapekong* as an instrument for interpreting *tawhīd* did not emerge from a vacuum. It was the product of concrete lived experience, in which encounters with the Chinese community and their religious symbols had historically been part of the everyday reality of the Sundanese people in Priangan. Yet this encounter should not be understood only as a matter of religious difference. In early twentieth-century Java, Chinese presence was also embedded in a wider colonial political

See: Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–15.

economy in which commerce, taxation, urban settlement, and ethnic classification shaped everyday perceptions of communal difference.

The term *tapekong* denotes Tua Pek Kong, a figure venerated within Chinese folk religion in Southeast Asia. Jack Meng-Tat Chia demonstrates that Tua Pek Kong was not a standardized deity within the bureaucratic pantheon of Chinese gods but a personal being worshipped as the God of Prosperity, manifesting in at least three forms: as a symbol of sworn brotherhood, as a Sino-Malay deity, and as a Sinicized god.³⁴ In Indonesia, this cult was also widespread among Chinese diaspora communities, particularly in towns and trading centers where they had established settlements.³⁵

Linguistically, the term *tapekong* had been fully assimilated into local languages well before Muhammad Nuh's time. Jonathan Rigg, in his mid-nineteenth-century Sundanese-English dictionary,³⁶ defines this word as *topékong*, meaning "name given by the Javanese and Malays to the principal idol of a Chinese temple," and also records its derivative form *imah topékong* (a Chinese temple). It is therefore worth noting that the incorporation of this term into Sundanese dictionaries indicates that the Sundanese encounter with Chinese religious symbols was by no means new at the time Muhammad Nuh composed his work.

This familiarity was rooted in the long history of the Chinese presence in Priangan. On the one hand, Priangan was a territory systematically closed off to the Chinese by the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC), a ban closely linked to the *Preangerstelsel*, a system of forced coffee cultivation (1677–1870), within which Chinese merchants were perceived as a

³⁴ Jack Meng-Tat Chia, "Who Is Tua Pek Kong? The Cult of Grand Uncle in Malaysia and Singapore," *Archiv Orientalni* 85, no. 3 (2017).

³⁵ William L. Gibson, "Klenteng Ancol: Keramat, Lords of the Land, and Autochthonous Relations in Chinese Batavia," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 53, no. 157 (September 2025): 240–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2025.2571837>.

³⁶ Jonathan Rigg, *A Dictionary of the Sunda Language of Java* (Batavia: Lange, 1862), 502.

threat to the colonial coffee monopoly.³⁷ On the other hand, the return of the Chinese became noticeable once the *Preangerstelsel* ceased to dominate. With a *besluit* (decree) dated 9 June 1810, Governor-General Daendels ordered the establishment of Chinatown (*Kampung Cina*). In Cianjur specifically, this decree was implemented during the tenure of Raden Adipati Wiratanu VI (Dalem Enoch) as regent,³⁸ stimulating the growth of the Chinese population, which reached 103 persons by 1847.³⁹ Significantly, Dalem Enoch was the grandfather of Muhammad Mukhtar ibn Atarid, who in turn was connected by kinship to Muhammad Nuh,⁴⁰ revealing that the encounter between the Sundanese aristocratic-scholarly elite and the Chinese community possessed a dimension deeply rooted in local political history.

The existence of the *Kampung Cina* created a distinctive spatial pattern in which the Chinese community was concentrated around marketplaces and main arteries.⁴¹ In Cianjur, the *kelenteng* Bhumi Pharsjia (Hok Tek Bio), established in 1880, stood at the heart of the town.⁴² Furnivall⁴³ describes this spatial arrangement as

³⁷ A. R. T. Kemasang, "Overseas Chinese in Java and Their Liquidation in 1740," *Southeast Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1981): 133, https://doi.org/10.20495/tak.19.2_123; See also: Jan Breman, *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market: Profits from an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 61–64.

³⁸ Sugiri Kustedja, "Jejak Komunitas Tionghoa Dan Perkembangan Kota Bandung," *Jurnal Sositologi* 11, no. 26 (August 2012): 113–14; Lubis, *Kehidupan Kaum Ménak Priangan, 1800-1942*, 379.

³⁹ P. Bleeker, "Bijdragen Tot de Statistiek Der Bevolking van Java," *Tijdschrift Voor Neerland's Indië* 9, no. 2 (1847): 108. Although this number was relatively small compared to the indigenous population, their concentration in urban centers and their dominance in commerce rendered their presence far more visible and economically noticeable than their demographic numbers would suggest. See also Tan, *The Chinese of Sukabumi*, 39.

⁴⁰ Rohmana, "Sundanese 'Kitāb' Printed in Early-Twentieth-Century Egypt as Evidence of Islamic Transregional Networks," 197–98.

⁴¹ Tan, *The Chinese of Sukabumi*, 45.

⁴² This area has remained embedded in local collective memory as "Jalan Shanghai" (Shanghai Street), despite having been officially renamed as Mangun Sarkoro Street.

⁴³ J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice. A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 304–5.

characteristic of a “plural society” in Southeast Asian colonies, where different ethnic groups “mix but do not combine,” meeting only in the marketplace. However, a local chronicle written by a *ménak* woman, the *Babad Cianjur*, shows that interactions between these communities extended beyond the market. It records the memories of a Sundanese aristocrat who witnessed *tapekong* statues being paraded publicly in a festival in the early twentieth century.⁴⁴ Thus, these visual signs of religious identity were not only static elements in temples but periodically entered the wider public space and became arguably the most recognizable symbols of non-Islamic religions in the town.

At this point, the connection between the social landscape described above and Muhammad Nuh’s rhetorical choice becomes clearer. When he came of age in Cianjur at the turn of the twentieth century, the *kelenteng* and the *tapekong* were not abstractions. They were part of his urban experience. This experience was strengthened by his socio-political position as a *ménak* whose family was connected to local governance. A local biographical note⁴⁵ on Muhammad Nuh further states that he was not merely sympathetic to Islamic associational politics but had served as an adviser (*juru naséhat*) to the Sarekat Islam (SI),⁴⁶ which was led by Hadji Oemar Said Tjokroaminoto (d. 1934). The same source records that, during the episode of “SI Afdeling B,” he came under “heavy pressure” from the Dutch colonial government.⁴⁷

This detail allows his reference to *tapekong* to be situated more precisely. SI emerged in a colonial economy marked by indigenous Muslim commercial complaints, Chinese economic visibility, and

⁴⁴ Nurwansah, *Babad Cianjur Karya Nyai Mas Syarifah Didoh* (1974), 60, 100.

⁴⁵ Abubakar, *Lenyepaneun: Kumpulan Piwejang-Piwejang R.H. Mh. Nuh Nalika Masih Kenéh Jumeng Dina Pangaosan Madrasah Kaum Cianjur*, 6.

⁴⁶ For more about SI, see Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴⁷ For more on this political affair, see Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900–1942*, 197.

Dutch racial-economic governance. Azra⁴⁸ shows that polemic toward the Chinese was intensified by Chinese economic predominance and colonial concessions, while the early SI became one of the arenas in which such tensions were articulated. Yet this context should not be overread. Muhammad Nuh's manuscript does not attack the Chinese community. Rather, his SI background indicates that he lived within a field of Islamic activism where Chinese presence was socially visible not only through temples and ritual objects, but also through commercial and political tensions. In this setting, *tapekong* functioned as a locally intelligible example for explaining the boundary between *tawhīd* and worship directed toward anything other than Allah.

Theological Localization: *Tapekong* as the Anti-*Tawhīd*

Philological identification demonstrates that the selection of a term and its placement in the text indicate importance of meaning. Muhammad Nuh positioned the term *tapekong* not within his poetic translation (the *nadoman*) but within an endnote that he had designed to occupy a highly essential position in the interpretation of al-Marzūqī's *tawhīd* concepts. This placement reveals something fundamental about the vernacularization strategy pursued by the translator.

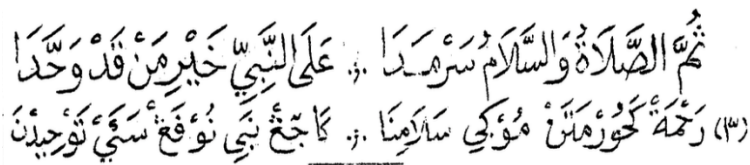


Figure 2. The third verse of the 'Aqīdat al-'awām and its translation into Sundanese by Muhammad Nuh

Specifically, the term *tapekong* appears in endnote number three (see Figure 2). It functioned as an explanation of his translation of al-Marzūqī's third verse. The source text above is transcribed and translated as follows:

⁴⁸ Azyumardi Azra, "The Indies Chinese and the Sarekat Islam: An Account of the Anti-Chinese Riots in Colonial Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 1, no. 1 (1994): 25–53, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v1i1.865>.

Arabic Naẓm	Sundanese Nadoman
<i>Thumma al-ṣalātu wa al-salāmu sarmadā # 'alá al-Nabīyi khayri man qad waḥḥadā</i>	(3) <i>Rahmat kahormatan mugi salamina # Ka jeung Nabi nu pang sae tawḥīd-na</i>
English translation: Then, may blessings and peace be eternally bestowed upon the Prophet, the finest of those who affirmed God's oneness.	English translation: (3) May mercy and honor be forever [granted] to the Prophet whose <i>tawḥīd</i> is the most excellent.

The orthography above displays a noteworthy scribal convention. Whereas contemporary endnote numbering typically places the reference numeral after the word or passage to be explained, Muhammad Nuh consistently placed the numeral at the beginning of the Sundanese translation. Nevertheless, he also consistently indicated within the translation itself the specific word or phrase that he intended to elaborate upon in the corresponding endnote.

Figure 3. Paratext in the Sundanese Islamic text

The example in Figure 3 shows that Muhammad Nuh did not intend to provide an explanation for the third verse as a whole. His aim was to clarify the meaning of a single word: “*tawḥīd-na*.” As shown in the figure, the word is written plainly, followed by a dash (–) that separates it from the explanation he wished to deliver.

This example occurs at the very beginning of the text, in the section devoted to the veneration of the Prophet Muhammad. The transcription above shows that the verse positions the Prophet as *khayru man qad waḥḥadā*, “the finest of those who affirmed God’s oneness.” Muhammad Nuh rendered this phrase as *nu pang sae tawḥīd-na*, “whose *tawḥīd* is the most excellent.” The most striking

point of divergence lies in the word *wahḥadā*, which Muhammad Nuh translated as *tawḥīd-na*.

Semantically, the two forms refer to the same meaning: “oneness.” What distinguishes them is that *wahḥadā* is a simple past-tense verb in Arabic (*fi'l māḍi*), whereas the translated version exhibits a phenomenon of vernacularization. The word *tawḥīd*, which is itself an Arabic verbal noun (*maṣḍar*), has been affixed with the characteristically Sundanese suffix (*-na*), denoting possession. The choice of *tawḥīd-na* can be understood as Muhammad Nuh's need for a Sundanese expression capable of rendering *wahḥadā*, while simultaneously satisfying the demands of prosody and rhyme (*qāfiyah*). Since no suitable native equivalent appears to have been found, the translator resorted to “Sundanizing” the Arabic term *tawḥīd*. Because the translated word remained Arabic, Muhammad Nuh felt compelled to elaborate upon it further in the paratextual space he had prepared, so that his lay audience could understand the concept. To facilitate cross-referencing, he inscribed the numeral three (3) at the beginning of the verse translation.

It is here that the case of *tapekong* emerges. The restriction of space and poetic convention led Muhammad Nuh to refrain from using the *nadoman* as a space for negotiating Islamic culture with local culture.⁴⁹ Instead, he transformed the paratext into a space for expression, a site where the traces of inter-ethnic historical relations were recorded. Muhammad Nuh clearly interpreted *tawḥīd-na* as: *hartina tawḥīd ngunggulkeun ibadah ka Allah henteu jeung ibadah ka tapekong upamana* (*tawḥīd* means prioritizing worship of Allah, not worshipping *tapekong*, for instance).

At the literal level, the use of the word *ngunggulkeun* (prioritizing) indicates that the translator intended to convey the meaning that nothing is worthy of being taken as God except Allah. To reinforce this meaning, Muhammad Nuh then appended a negation marker: *henteu* (not). Consequently, the word or phrase appearing after *henteu* carries a meaning that is the direct opposite

⁴⁹ cf. Neneng Yanti Khozanatu Lahpan, “Nadoman Sebagai Ruang Negosiasi Dalam Pertemuan Islam Dan Budaya Sunda,” *Lopian: Jurnal Pengetahuan Lokal* 1, no. 1 (April 2021): 1–23.

of the word or phrase preceding it. What is striking here is that, rather than employing a neutral expression (for example, *henteu ibadah ka anu séjén*, meaning “not worshipping anything else”), he explicitly chose the word *tapekong* as the semantic counterpoint to *ngunggulkeun ibadah ka Allah* (or, in other words, to *tawhīd*). Moreover, the use of *upamana* (for instance) confirms that *tapekong* is the only example offered as a representation of “the other.” Theologically, this choice carries the implication that *tapekong* represents the binary opposite of *tawhīd*: associating partners with God (*shirk*).

This does not mean that Sundanese lacked other possible referents for explaining *shirk*. Nineteenth-century Sundanese lexicography records several terms that could have served this purpose. Rigg⁵⁰ defines *barahala* as “some mystical being” and “an idol”; *harcha* as “idols” or “objects of pagan worship”; *déwa* and *déwata* as heathen gods or divinities; *batara* as the Hindu godhead applied to several divinities; and *jimat* as an amulet, talisman, written charm, or incantation. These terms show that Muhammad Nuh had access, at least in the wider Sundanese lexical field, to several non-Islamic or extra-Islamic referents that could be mobilized to explain improper objects of devotion. Yet each term would have produced a different semantic effect. *Barahala*, *harcha*, *déwa*, *déwata*, and *batara* would have evoked a more generic, Indic, or pre-Islamic register, while *jimat* would have referred more directly to magical protection than to temple worship. *Tapekong*, by contrast, is a visible and contemporary ritual object associated with Chinese religious life in the urban environment of Priangan. Its force lies not only in its theological opposition to *tawhīd*, but also in its social immediacy.

Thus, the significance of *tapekong* lies not in the absence of other Sundanese terms, but in Muhammad Nuh’s selective choice among available referents. Throughout the entire set of endnotes in this manuscript, *tapekong* is the only non-Islamic cultural referent that Muhammad Nuh introduced. Furthermore, its placement in the opening verses, rather than in the doctrinal core of the text, indicates that the use of *tapekong* was intended as an

⁵⁰ Rigg, *A Dictionary of the Sunda Language of Java*.

essential preamble for comprehending the *tawhīd* concepts contained in the book as a whole.

This philological finding points to Muhammad Nuh's commitment to explaining Ash'arite theological doctrine, which has been overwhelmingly dominant in Indonesia.⁵¹ Within Ash'arite theology, the oneness of God (*waḥdaniyah*) is demonstrated through both rationalistic (*'aqlī*) and textual (*naqlī*) arguments, with the Quran (QS 21:22; 22:30) explicitly positioning the worship of idols (*awṭhān*) as the antithesis of *tawhīd*, corresponding to the daily experience of pre-Islamic Arabia.⁵² Nevertheless, when disseminated through vernacular texts, not all Ash'arite *tawhīd* texts illustrate their doctrines through local narratives. In the East African coastal tradition, Shaykh Qāssim al-Barawī of Somalia (d. 1922) translated the *'Aqīdat al-'awām* into local poetry (*Nakaanza khtuunga marjaani*) but carried out a faithful translation without local cultural references, rendering *khayru man qad waḥḥadā* simply as "the best of all Muslims."⁵³ Similarly, in a Javanese-language manuscript from Pesantren Qomaruddin in Gresik (DREAMSEA, DS 0097 00071), the word *waḥḥadā* is translated as *nauhidaken* (to affirm oneness) without any locally inflected interpretation,⁵⁴ despite Gresik's documented contact with Chinese traditions since the fifteenth century.⁵⁵

Muhammad Nuh, however, took a different approach. As a *kiai* writing for "Sundanese people who do not understand Arabic" in the twentieth century, he needed to bridge the gap between the abstractions of Ash'arite theology and the concrete daily experience of his audience. By mentioning *tapekong*,

⁵¹ Bruckmayr, "The Šarḥ/Hāšiya Phenomenon in Southeast Asia."

⁵² Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 10th Edition (London: Macmillan Education, 1970), 118.

⁵³ Vianello, Kapteijns, and Kassim, "'Stringing Coral Beads,'" 193.

⁵⁴ Although this manuscript is believed to have been produced by a *santri*, as evidenced by the existence of other corpora with similar characteristics in the same database, none of these texts display locally inflected interpretation, including in their marginalia. This suggests that such local cultural engagement was not rendered textually, perhaps orally.

⁵⁵ Alexander Wain, "Chinese Muslims and the Conversion of the Nusantara to Islam" (PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 2015), 254–57.

Muhammad Nuh performed what is commonly known in translation studies as “concretization,” drawing on Andrew Chesterman’s concept of “explicitation.”⁵⁶ Rather than explaining *shirk* as a philosophical-theological concept of *ta’addud* (the multiplicity of deities), he pointed directly to a practice that his readers could witness at the marketplace, in the town center, and in front of the *kelenteng*.

This finding effectively amplifies what Zuhri has shown regarding the vernacularization of Islamic theological texts in Java.⁵⁷ According to Zuhri, such texts tended to preserve the original Arabic terms without concretizing them into local cultural references, such that vernacularization functioned as a tool of knowledge transmission whose substance remained unchanged. What Muhammad Nuh did, however, transcends this transmissive model. He did not merely translate the term *shirk* into Sundanese. He transformed it into something culturally meaningful for his followers, turning *tapekong* into an empirical marker of an otherwise abstract theological concept.

The socio-historical context clarifies why *tapekong*, rather than any other cultural referent, was the instrument Muhammad Nuh chose. First, it was a contemporary reality, not an archaic one: the *kelenteng* and *tapekong* were visually present in the urban centers of Priangan, familiar to Muhammad Nuh’s audience. Second, it constituted “the other” in a manner that was socially unambiguous: the Chinese community, to amplify Furnivall’s terminology, did not blend fluidly into Sundanese Muslim society. Third, and most fundamentally, *tapekong* was a religious symbol that was theologically unambiguous from an Islamic perspective. Compared with other cultural referents, *tapekong* had a sharper indexical function, pointed simultaneously to an object of worship,

⁵⁶ This concept refers to a strategy whereby abstract terms or concepts in the source language are translated into more concrete, illustrative, and specific expressions in the target language. See: Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory*, Revised edition, Benjamins Translation Library (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2016), 105.

⁵⁷ Zuhri, “Beyond Syncretism.”

a visible religious institution, and a socially recognizable non-Muslim presence in colonial Priangan.

Notwithstanding this, an analysis of the tone and diction of the manuscript reveals that Muhammad Nuh employed *tapekong* in a descriptive-informative register, not a polemical or confrontational one. He did not condemn, criticize, or attack the Chinese community or their religious practices. He simply pointed to *tapekong* as an example of what is theologically opposed to Islamic monotheism, an approach that aligns more closely with *ta'lim* (pedagogy) than with *da'wah* (proselytization) or *jadal* (disputation). This is consistent with the character of the *'Aqīdat al-'awām* as a pedagogical text for the laity, not a polemical treatise for intellectuals.

What Muhammad Nuh did with al-Marzuqi's work was a strategy of "theological localization." Unlike vernacularization in the transmissive sense, which merely transfers terms into local languages, this method actively embeds theological concepts within a socio-cultural locus. Employing the specific strategy of "concretization," not only are doctrines understood cognitively but they also take root sociologically. In Muhammad Nuh's case, accordingly, *tapekong* is not simply an example of *shirk*. It is the locus in which the interpretation of *tawhīd* was embedded in the concrete lived experience of the Sundanese Muslim community in early twentieth-century Priangan. Through this process, *tawhīd* became more than a doctrine. It became a way for a community to define and situate itself within a plural society.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the use of *tapekong* in Raden Haji Muhammad Nuh's Sundanese *'Aqīdat al-'awām* was a deliberate act of what is here termed "theological localization." It is a process in which *tawhīd* was transformed from a doctrinal abstraction into a marker of communal identity rooted in the daily life of the Sundanese Muslim community in early twentieth-century Priangan.

This finding contributes to three academic discourses. First, it demonstrates that the vernacularization of Islamic theology is not always transmissive, merely transferring Arabic terms into a local

language without altering their substance. The case of Muhammad Nuh reveals the transformative dimension of this process, in which the concretization of the concept of *shirk* through a Chinese cultural referent actively shaped, rather than merely delivered, the theological understanding of the audience. Second, it expands the scope of the study of Sundanese Islamic vernacularization, which has thus far focused predominantly on Quranic translation, by directing attention to creedal texts (*'aqidah*) that constitute the most foundational curriculum within the *pesantren* tradition. Third, it opens a theological perspective on the study of Islam-China relations in Indonesia, a dimension that has hitherto been overlooked by scholarship more concerned with socio-political and economic aspects.

This vernacular text reveals that the *tapekong* was not merely a passive social backdrop but was actively appropriated as a rhetorical instrument within the internal theological discourse of the Sundanese Muslim community. Interfaith encounters, this case suggests, do not always manifest in direct dialogue or open conflict. They could also be registered quietly in paratextual notes, translations, and pedagogical explanations addressed to the Muslim laity (*'awām*).

Ultimately, this study also suggests several directions for future research. Comparative work is needed on how Arabic creedal texts were vernacularized across Southeast Asian manuscript cultures. Ethnographic research is also needed to examine how *'Aqīdat al-'Awām* is currently taught, translated, memorized, and sung in Islamic educational institutions. Further studies may also investigate whether the use of Chinese religious referents in Islamic pedagogical texts was an isolated case or part of a broader pattern of interreligious semantic localization.

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