

TABOT TRADITION AND ACCULTURATIVE RELIGIOUS TRADITION OF THE BENGKULU COMMUNITY

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Abstract: This article aims to explain the Tabot tradition and its cultural construction with the Bengkulu people as a minority group. The Tabot tradition experienced a kind of acculturation process in which two or more cultures met and made contact. Using Berry's acculturation theory with a qualitative approach and ethnographic methods, this study resulted in a finding that the Tabot tradition resulted from a process of cultural acculturation between different religious and cultural contacts. In its journey, the Tabot is no longer a non-formal tradition but has become a local Bengkulu community organisation with the formation of the Tabot Harmony Family (KKT). The strategy chosen by KKT is to maintain its cultural and community heritage is integration. In this context, integration means maintaining the original culture and cultural contact.

Keywords: Tabot, religious-cultural traditions, local Islam, acculturation.

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Introduction

In Indonesia, the custom is a set of acculturative cultural values and traditions.¹ The diversity of individual and group backgrounds is undeniable and requires adaptation to coexist with the local community.² Customary acculturation occurs when the meeting of two different cultural elements comes and blends into the same life without losing the original identity of the two cultures.³ Like Islamic law and adat, both are also mutually acculturating Fields.⁴ Indonesia, with its ethnic and cultural diversity, has created a new harmony between religion and custom as the foundation of the religion.⁵

The acculturation of these two elements occurs in the Bengkulu community, where a religious tradition is called *Tabot*. This tradition is unique if traced to India (Punjab). It has been deeply rooted in the people of Bengkulu. In addition, this tradition is allegedly rooted in Shia culture every Islamic new year.⁶ Based on the preliminary research, the researcher interviewed one person from the Tabot community who said that the Tabot family preserved this tradition without knowing the reason and origin of this tradition being inherited (Interview with Afril, 2021).

The Tabot tradition originates from the Karbala tragedy's religious ritual, where the Prophet Muhammad's grandson (Husayn) was killed, so the Shia group commemorated it with religious and political motives.⁷ To commemorate Husein's death, Shia groups commemorate the incident by being whipped and chained until they bleed. Daneshgar said that the Karbala tragedy is often commemorated in various countries, such as Iraq, India, Iran, and even Indonesia, precisely in Sumatra. In some ancient manuscripts, this ritual is also carried out in Singapore, which is contained in the lithograph *Syair Tabut Encik Ali* written in Malay and Jawi script on the commemoration of Muharram

1864 in Singapore.⁸ The Tabot ritual is specially commemorated every Islamic New Year (Muharram), which is known as Ashura Day.

The Tabot ritual in Bengkulu is held for 10 days in the month of Muharram to commemorate the tragedy of Karbala and the Islamic revival of the 17th and 13th centuries. However, the Tabot family, who as members of the KKT (Keluarga Kerukunan Tabot), said that the Tabot tradition had been transformed into a typical Bengkulu tradition where acculturation has occurred with local culture. Acculturation means that the Tabot tradition is no longer motivated by commemorating the Karbala tragedy but has become an annual culture every Muharram month. Therefore, the Bengkulu Provincial government supports the Tabot as a typical Bengkulu tradition. The Bengkulu community, which incidentally is Sunni Islam, is antipathetic to rituals that smell Shia and considers this tradition contrary to the understanding of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamâ'ah* (Aswaja). However, based on preliminary research, researchers made initial observations at the end of August 2021 when the Tabot ritual was held in Bengkulu. I assisted by an interview with one visitor who said:

“This ritual has become a routine culture held every year in the month of Muharram. The community is very enthusiastic. They come from various parts, such as Padang, Kalimantan, East Java, and even Bali. Those who celebrate also come from affiliation backgrounds such as NU and Muhammadiyah, so they don't feel that this tradition comes from Shia” (Interview with Misrawi, 20 August 2021).

This shows that the Tabot tradition has indirectly created a harmonisation that shows Islamic wasamiah so that the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013, established the Tabot as a national cultural heritage of the Bengkulu Province. During the Covid-19 pandemic,

the Bengkulu Provincial Government held a limited meeting with KKT, who gave permission and fully supported the implementation of the Tabot tradition at the annual festival with the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy. In a review of Islamic law, the Tabot tradition is classified as an aspect of 'urf where cultural heritage is a study of *ushul fiqh*. Contradiction occurs when historical analysis mentions the Tabot tradition brought by the Indian Punjab community in the 13th century, which was spearheaded by Sheikh Burhanuddin (Imam Senggolo), at which time the commemoration of the tragedy of Karbala was popular in India.

There is a gap circle where the Shia tradition, Bengkulu culture, Islamic law review, and government support seem to be a unique distinction. This is important in finding patterns and models of acculturative construction of the religious tradition of the Tabot in the Bengkulu society.

Methods

This study is classified as religious and cultural research where the Tabot custom, a religious culture of the Bengkulu people, is held every Islamic New Year. Due to field research with the main purpose of a blueprint, this research uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods. This method is suitable for interpreting the value of a Tabot tradition, the behaviour of the people who celebrate it, and the community's belief in this tradition which has deep roots, even though it is diasporic.⁹ This research was conducted from 1 Muharram 1443 H or 10 August 2021, starting with research permits from the Chair of KKT Bancoolen, local government such as the Village Head and continued with pre-ritual observations of Tabot which were carried out before 10 Muharram 1443 H until a series of Tabot processions were carried out. The research will continue after the procession until mid-December 2021. The aim is to obtain more in-depth information regarding this tradition.

The main data mining was carried out by in-depth interviews with 10 people, including 4 people from the Tabot family, 2 people each as Manager of KKT Bancoolen, 1 person as Chair of KKT Bancoolen, and 1 Secretary of KKT Bancoolen. To get information about government support and local regulations for the Tabot custom, the researchers interviewed 1 Head of the Bengkulu Province Culture and Tourism Office and 2 Heads of Museums in Bengkulu. The other 3 people are Bengkulu people who participated in the celebration of the traditional Tabot tradition. Data sources were also obtained from the documentation of several regional regulations regarding the preservation of Bengkulu customs and the celebration of the Tabot festival. Observations were also made to understand the Tabot tradition's implementation. The three data mining was conducted ethnographically, where researchers were involved and mingled with the community from the Tabot and non- Tabot circles.

This study uses ethnography, and then the data analysis uses the theory of Miles and Huberman. Data analysis is done by data reduction procedures, data presentation, and concluding.¹⁰ In the first stage, namely data reduction, the researcher selects the data and then groups them according to the research theme. Researchers discard data irrelevant to the research theme when collecting data groupings. After that, the next stage is the presentation of data (data displays). Researchers make patterns to relate to each other according to the theme of the conclusion in the last stage of concluding/verification (conclusion drawing/verification).

Previous Research

The main corpus of this research is about the Tabot tradition, which is carried out in Bengkulu. This section will explain a gap analysis, which distinguishes or differentiates previous research from future research.

Lunn and Byl conducted the first two studies in the same year (2017) on the Tabot poem manuscript of Encik Ali, found in the Klinkert collection at the Leiden University library in the Netherlands. This verse reveals the traditional Tabot procession and the participation of the Sunni Shia community in an annual tradition held in Singapore in 1864. As a typical Bengkulu tradition, this tradition has spread to neighbouring countries to polarise the Malay community through poetry taught by Encik Ali.¹¹ The difference with the research that will be conducted lies in the Tabot tradition as a blueprint for religious moderation offered by Bengkulu province, while Lunn and Byl's research is in the Bengkulu Tabot tradition manuscript, which is also practised in Singapore.

The second research from Marhayati reveals the Tabot community's acculturation strategy as a Bengkulu minority group that maintains the Tabot as a hereditary tradition is carried out by aligning it with the local culture.¹² The difference with the research that will be conducted lies in the Tabot custom as a blueprint for religious moderation offered by Bengkulu province, while Marhayati's research discusses the strategy of the Tabot minority group in maintaining their tradition in Bengkulu.

The third research by Michael R. Feener explains the history of the Tabot tradition as part of the localisation of Bengkulu people. The Tabot Festival, held every Muharram month in Bengkulu, reinterprets Indian foreign culture into a local cultural heritage typical of Bengkulu.¹³ The difference with the research that will be conducted lies in the existing position of the Tabot tradition as a blueprint manifestation of religious moderation, while Feener's research only reveals the history of the Tabot tradition as part of Bengkulu's local cultural heritage.

The fourth study from Daneshgar examines the Ashura tradition in the Malay-Indonesian world at the Tabot festival

according to the view of a Dutch scholar in Oscar Lewis Helfrich's article in 1888. According to them, the Tabot festival is an intersection of cultures and religious rituals between the Middle East and South Asia regions and Southeast Asia.¹⁴ The difference with the research that will be conducted lies in the orientation towards reading the reality of the Tabot tradition from the perspective of the Dutch scholar and the Muslim scholar, both of which depart from the assumption that the Tabot tradition is a Bengkulu religious cultural tradition. Still, the difference is also in reading the Tabot tradition as a blueprint for religious moderation offered by Bengkulu.

This study uses three main theories. First, the theory of acculturation of the Tabot's custom was extracted from John Berry, namely integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalisation.¹⁵ The reasoning for using this theory is that the Tabot custom is not a native Bengkulu. Still, a diasporic tradition from Punjab, India, has been acculturated with the local Bengkulu culture, so Berry's acculturation theory must explain this process. Second, this study uses the theory of cultural and religious blueprints for a multi-ethnic country. Elisabeth Özdalga started this theory described how the strategic points of the Ottoman sultanate of Turkey in the face of modernity in the 1830s¹⁶ as it is known that the Ottoman territory, which includes Anatolia, Thrace, Mesopotamia, the Balkans, North Africa, the Caucasus, to some parts of Asia. This great power gave rise to the multi-ethnic diversity that needed a blueprint to protect the countries under the Ottoman sultanate. The blueprint is called 'multi-ethnic' because it contains strategic points of religious and state moderation that include the demands, challenges, and needs of countries under the Ottoman rule of managing the state. This blueprint is intended so that the Ottoman sultanate can determine the goals, objectives, strategies, and program focus that will be implemented to achieve the three strategic points above.

Third, the theory of the sociology of religion started by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. The theory contains a study of culture and social life in viewing religion as a construction in shaping a particular society. The sociology of religion observes religious communities through culture and social life from an empirical point of view as a scientific approach.¹⁷ With the sociology of religion, Tabot customs are a relationship of long-rooted traditional and cultural values and embody a unique social life as the shaper of the Bengkulu society.

Theoretical Framework

Forming Cultural and Islamic Acculturation in Indonesia

Although most of Indonesia's population is Muslim, compared to other Islamic countries, the theory of 'Arabization' has deep roots in Indonesia.¹⁸ However, local traditions have not been completely lost in Islamization. Instead of using military force, Islamic leaders have moderated Islam through trade, art, marriage, and education.¹⁹ Acculturation cannot be ignored when discussing the formation of Islamic culture in Indonesia. Customary acculturation occurs when the meeting of two different cultural elements comes and blends in the same life without losing the original identity of the two cultures.²⁰ This can be interpreted as combining two or more cultures that influence and absorb the characteristics of each culture. Islam is dynamic, elastic, and accommodating to local culture as long as it does not conflict with Islamic principles.

Islam is not an antipathy to culture. They are tolerant of local culture. An example is the design of the mosque. The Great Mosque of Demak has a *ranggon* or tiered roof,²¹ which reflects the concept of "Meru" from the Hindu-Buddhist civilisation.²² It originally had nine levels before Sunan Kalijaga cut it into three. The number three reflects three different aspects of a

Muslim: Faith, Islam, and good deeds. While Buddhism and Hinduism introduced stupas when spreading Buddhism and Hinduism in Indonesia, Islam did not bring Middle Eastern symbols of Islam to this country.

From this, it can be concluded that Islam is not antipathy toward culture. Every aspect of culture can be adapted to its religion. However, there are differences in the reconciliation and acculturation models of the spread of Islamic culture in Indonesia. The model in rural Java differs from that in coastal areas. Islam in rural Java is a syncretic,²³ even though the people have already said the *syahadat*. People still believe in *Batara Guru*, *Batara Wisnu*, *Dewata Sewwa'E*, and other fields.²⁴ Meanwhile, Islam in coastal areas is more dynamic because it has higher social mobility and follows the development of the Islamic world.²⁵

As explained above, acculturation must be recognised in considering the formation of Islamic culture in Indonesia. Cultural contact is unavoidable since Islamization has involved many channels, including art, *wayang* performances, marriage, education, trade, Sufism and Sufism. In the end, local cultural characteristics merged with the process of Islamization.

Two forms of traditional Indonesian culture are related to Islamic influences: court culture and popular culture. The palace culture was developed by *abdi ndalem* (courtiers) or *bangsawan* (nobles),²⁶ ranging from poets to architects. The king has full authority to create certain cultural symbols to preserve his dominance. These symbols are usually mythical and found in several collections of royal literature, including *babad*, *hikayat*, and *Lontara*.²⁷ Some myths are as literary works that contain mystical stories about magic, magic, and other supernatural powers. Myths evoke obedience and loyalty to authority.²⁸

It should be noted that the Kraton culture outside Java has more in common with the Islamic concept. In Aceh, a king is known as *al-Malik al-‘Adl*. In contrast to the Javanese palace culture, which emphasises the concept of authority and culture. Kraton, outside Java, puts more emphasis on the concept of justice. Since the concept of full power was implemented in the Javanese court, the conflict between Javanese culture and Islam increased during Islamization. Social conflicts are among those that cause tension between rulers and people. The Javanese concept of social obedience rests on the full authority of the king, while Islam teaches that social compliance is built with the enforcement of sharia law. Islam is more defensive of cultural influences. The aristocrats and courtiers accepted certain Islamic influences as long as they adapted to the Javanese authority’s status quo. This is characteristic of Javanese palace culture for Islam. This differs from the palace culture outside Java, which is more accepting of Islamic influences.

Like palace culture, popular culture also has myths and mystical stories. An example is the story of Sunan Kalijaga, who is believed by the community to have a stone, which is the remains of his prostration. In addition, there is the story of a prominent kyai (Javanese kyai), who prayed in Mecca before returning to his pesantren. Although the influence of Islamic popular culture is more focused on mystical stories, the development of culture in Indonesia absorbs more Islamic symbols. Thus, Islam is an important cultural resource for Indonesian popular culture. The influence of Islam also affects several disciplines in popular culture. In traditional knowledge, called “*ngelmu*”,²⁹ Islam discusses various topics, ranging from cosmological behaviour in the marriage.³⁰

Islamic popular culture has also emerged in ritualistic forms and social expressions, including in the “Tabot” ritual in Bengkulu

to commemorate the Islamic New Year and the martyrdom of Husein's descendants. There is also a "sekatenan" celebration to commemorate the *maulid* (commemoration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). Meanwhile, Islam influenced the art of music as *qasidah*, *rebana* and *gambus* in Java, Sumatera and Sulawesi.³¹ Differences in history, geography and culture have influenced Islamic culture in Indonesia. Islamic culture in Java is formed in a dialogical manner and through compromise. Meanwhile, the tribes outside Java must choose Islam as their new identity, abandon their local culture and beliefs, or reject Islam altogether.

Religious Acculturation and Culture Berry's

Berry first popularised the accu in 1997, emphasising how individuals and groups experience acculturation.³² This theory then gradually developed.³³ This acculturation view sees the interaction between two cultures in the same sphere of life. Berry divides acculturation into four methods: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation.³⁴

Berry's acculturation concept shows a two-dimensional scheme of different cultures that focuses on the preferences of "immigrant culture" and "local culture", as well as the level of frequency of contact (meeting) between these cultures.³⁵ Such cultural contact produces two products: cultural change and social psychology. Cultural change produces collective activity, and social institutions emerge as protectors of the changing culture. Meanwhile, in social psychology, there is a change in the repertoire of individual behaviour in everyday life.³⁶ Even Glenn and Malagodi say that cultural content originates when the behavioural repertoires of two or more individuals form an eternal unit (social institutions that have certain norms).³⁷

Bourhis, et.al. assert that the cultural dimension must be transformed into “cultural adoption.” Some researchers have suggested that there are implications when comparing the dimensions of cultural contact with Berry’s adaptation.³⁸ This implication shows that acculturation relates to the adaptation.³⁹ Van Acker and Vanbeselaere suggested that a response focusing on contact and cultural adoption can be indicated simultaneously because both have a positive and solid relationship.⁴⁰ Rodriguez, Zagefka, Navas and Cuadrado still use the term cultural maintenance in their research, but the term contact dimension is replaced by the ‘adoption dimension’.⁴¹ Because they think it is better to explore the concept of acculturation perception and its preferences in terms of the dimensions of cultural adaptation.

In line with the two dimensions of acculturation mentioned earlier, Berry suggests four acculturation strategies: integration (sticking with the cultural heritage and a strong desire to be involved in other cultures), assimilation (a departure from cultural heritage and more towards an exclusive orientation to foreign cultures), outside), segregation (separating the two cultures), and marginalisation (removing the two cultures with no cultural evaluation). Of these strategies, integration is the most preferred, as it is beneficial for individuals to cope with stress, depression, and acculturation uncertainty. In contrast, social contacts play an important role at the group level.⁴²

The four strategies discussed above are acculturation strategies experienced by non-dominant or minority groups, or what Berry calls an *ethnocultural community*. Besides ethnic-cultural groups, larger community groups also face four acculturation strategies: multicultural (larger communities maintain their cultural identity and will accept other cultures), and melting pot (individuals do not want to maintain their original culture but interact with other cultures), segregation (individuals have an interest in maintaining

cultural identity while other cultures are ignored or vice versa), and exclusion (individuals are a faceless chance of maintaining their original culture and do not interact with others).

Every culture can influence other people, but other cultures from outside (foreign cultures) dominate other cultures so that the non-dominant can influence the dominant group. Acculturation can increase the cultural diversity of the population, perceived prejudice and discrimination,⁴³ and the development of national policies (multiculturalism) (multikulturalisme).⁴⁴ Research on acculturation strategies in an ethnocultural group, which refers to the Tabot descent group, focuses on the problem of its cultural substance and identity. This Tabot family group in acculturation is considered a minority because the Tabot tradition only requires a small group of people to consider themselves descendants of Imam Senggolo.

The acculturation theory and its process are aimed at improving the welfare of the existence of local culture. In cross-cultural and cross-country contexts, acculturation emphasises the diaspora or migration factor, especially in the religious aspect.⁴⁵ However, this paper discusses the acculturation process of the Tabot's descendants, which has existed for over 300 years. Maintaining cultural heritage is important for this society and has resulted in its existence.

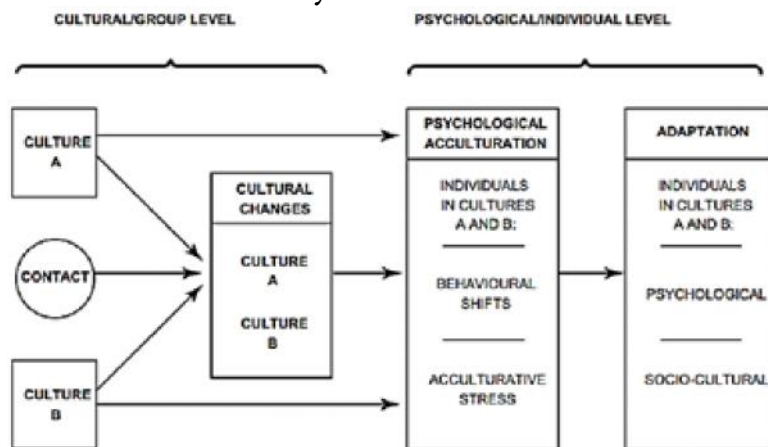


Figure 1. Framework for Understanding Acculturation⁴⁶

Figure 1 above describes how to understand acculturation. The figure illustrates that at the group level, it is the first step in determining the acculturation process, followed by the encounter of cultural contacts between cultures A and B, and finally, the characteristics of the relationships in those contacts and what cultural changes may occur in the two groups during acculturation. As a result, acculturative changes at the group level vary according to political, economic, demographic and cultural changes, which may be relatively limited or change substantially depending on the views of dominant and non-dominant groups.

Changes at the cultural group level become fundamental changes at the individual level (right side). Two types of change occur psychological and acculturation adaptation. Psychological acculturation arises when there is psychological acculturation of individuals from both cultures A and B, changes in attitude (i.e. speaking, dressing, eating), and acculturative stress (i.e. anxiety, uncertainty, depression, and psychopathology). Individuals from cultures A and B experience adaptation accompanied by psychological processes (i.e. feeling prosperous and proud) and socio-cultural processes, and there is contact with people in the new culture (i.e. competition in everyday life).⁴⁷

Gezentsvey's research emphasises a person's approach based on whether the last generation had inherited a legacy tradition. His research is appropriate to find the quality of a generation by examining its obedience through the customs of its ancestors, cultural knowledge or the tradition of the Tabot in particular, which is the focus of this research.⁴⁸ Based on these two cultures, mother tongue ability indicates the quality and quantity of future generations. In addition, the hierarchy of power for indigenous peoples also illustrates the sustainability of future generations. The sustainability of customary law communities depends on their ability to determine their way of life to achieve their life goals in

relation to cultural patterns, social institutions, and the legal system in their territory. Therefore, a tribal chief or community gureis must indicate an acculturation strategy at the minority level, which is undergoing the acculturation process. This study involved Tabot community leaders as informants to study further the Tabot family, a society that still maintains traditions and rituals.

Results and Discussion

The Tabot Tradition in Bengkulu

The term Tabot comes from the Arabic '*At-tabutu*' which means a chest made of wood. This terminology appears in the Qur'an, precisely in the letter Al-Baqarah verse 284, Allah explains that the Tabot is "a sign". The case in Indonesia today, the Tabot is no longer just a wooden chest but has been made in such a way that some are *pagodas* (as found in Korea),⁴⁹ and some are like mosque minarets. The main ingredients of manufacture are bamboo, and some are made of wood with various kinds of ornaments.⁵⁰

As a 'sign' of the holy book (al-Qur'an), the Tabot originated from a simple ritual in Iraq, Persia, and South India called *ta'ziyah*.⁵¹ Ta'ziyah with the ritual procession of the Tabot is also quite popular in North India.⁵² Meanwhile, there are two types of Tabot in Indonesia. The first is the Tabot of *Asan Usen* in Aceh and the Tabot in Sibolga and Riau, a simple ritual type. The second Tabot was in Bengkulu and Tabuik in Pariaman, elaborated into a theatrical performance.

Unlike in Aceh, Sibolga and Riau, the Tabot ritual in Bengkulu is an activity that aims to commemorate the martyrdom of Husein bin Ali Bin Abi Talib in Padang Karbala, Iraq.⁵³ In the history of Islam, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, the Islamic

leadership was alternately replaced by *Khulafâ' al-Râshidûn* (Abu Bakar al-Siddiq, Umar Bin Khattab, Uthman Bin Affan and Ali Bin Abi Thalib). During the leadership of Uthman Bin Affan, the seeds of the division of Muslims appeared. It increased when Ali Bin Abi Talib became the fourth caliph to replace Uthman. A quite violent confrontation came from the group of Muawiyah bin Abi Sofyan. Ali Bin Abi Talib's leadership ended after being killed by Abdurrahman bin Muljam from the Khawarij group. The tragedy of this murder caused a leadership vacuum among Muslims to be used by Muawiyah bin Abi Sofyan to proclaim his caliph. Muawiyah's claim to be the caliph of Islam was not recognised by Ali bin Abi Talib's supporters, causing a feud to continue to the next generation, namely Yazid on the side of Muawiyah and Husein on the side of Ali Bin Abi Talib.⁵⁴ This conflict continued to heat and culminated in the war in Padang Karbala, and Husein (the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) was killed in a *shahid* (martyrdom).⁵⁵ The death of Hussein caused deep sadness for his supporters. To commemorate the killing of Husein, the Tabot ritual was carried out.

The entry of Islam into Bengkulu is divided into three: through the West, South and East roads. The following is the scheme for the entry of Islam to Bengkulu:

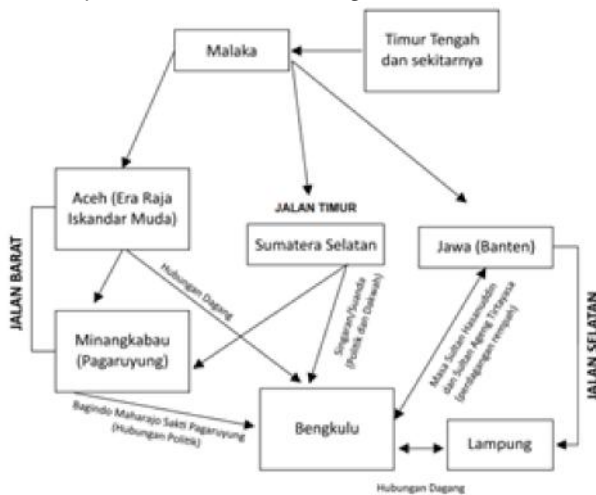


Figure 2. The Entry of Islam into Bengkulu. Source: (Japarudin, 2021)

Regarding the beginning of the Tabot ceremony in Bengkulu, according to the beliefs of members of the Tabot Family Harmony (KKT) it is related to the wave of Islamic broadcasting to the Archipelago Region from the Arabian Peninsula (Medinah-Karbala Iraq Iran) since the 7th century AD via the Arabian Sea to the Indus river and first settled in Punjab (India). The flow of the spread of Islam was increasingly swift in the 13th and 14th centuries AD, because of the destruction of Baghdad and mass killings in Iraq by the Mongols under the command of Hulagu Khan on February ten, 1258 AD / 27 Muharram 656 H. Beautiful and historic buildings including the library that kept the manuscripts of a thousand and one nights and other books were destroyed and destroyed.⁵⁶

The connection with Punjab made the content of the spread of Islam get a new touch,⁵⁷ it is even suspected that this touch was even more felt after the conquest of India by Muhammad bin Qasim, a governor of the Umayyad Dynasty in the 8th century.⁵⁸ With a touch from Punjab before arriving in Bengkulu, this Islamic expansion first landed and stopped in the land of Aceh by not settling there. This is evidenced by the Indrapuri mosque, previously a Hindu temple building in the 15th century.⁵⁹

Upon his arrival, Aceh established the kingdom of Samudera Pasai, with the ruling king being Sultan Mahmud Malik al-Zahir. This delegation from Punjab continued the voyage southward to Bandar Sungai Serut on Thursday, January 5, 1336 AD 18 Jumadil Awwal 736 H. Only 13 people arrived in Bengkulu safe from this group under the leadership of Maulana Ichsad, descendants of Ali Zainal Abidin bin Imam Al-Husayn. Among the known members of the group is Syech Abdurrahman (Batu Ampar), who died on Thursday, 12 April 1336 AD / 21 Sya'ban 736 H and was buried in Karbala Bengkulu. This tomb became the forerunner to the cult of the Tabot figure for the Bengkulu people.⁶⁰

Through interviews with various informants, the Tabot ceremony in Bengkulu was first associated with Maulana Ichsad in 1336. Bakar and Imam Sobari continued this tradition. However, the lineage of these three people has yet to be discovered. The celebration of the Tabot was continued by Shah Bedan and his son Burhanuddin Imam Senggolo. For the next period, the descendants of Imam Senggolo maintain and continued the Tabot tradition in Bengkulu.⁶¹

The subsequent development of the celebration of the Tabot was also enlivened by soldiers brought in by the British from Bengali.⁶² Halter said Syafril wrote: “The French squadron under the leadership of Comte Charles Henri d’Estaing left Bengkulu, after taking over Port Marlborough from the British for eight months between 1759-1760.⁶³ The British garrison again took control of Bengkulu, reinforced by the *Sepoy* or *Sipay* troops, and the first group came from Madras India. In 1785, the Madras sepoy was withdrawn and replaced by a second group sepoy from Bengal, Bangladesh.⁶⁴ This Sippy army group helped to make the Tabot with a few prayers ‘that they chanted:

“*Bismillahirrohmanirrohim* “yo modo yohawo kupinto mere lamban rohku, rohmu same lamban-lamban, Ipo Dewo dewo mere josoku dube mbun-mbun”.

Chaos occurred even more because they often drank and did things that were against the religion of Islam, so the place where they lived was called the *kepiri village* (which means “kafir village”). The prayer that the Sipay soldiers sang differed from the prayer inherited by Imam Senggolo, namely using Pakistani Punjabi Urdu which has its roots in Persian, namely:

“*Bismillahirrohmanirrohim saaluree, Mahuree yaa Sahuree. Sarare, Tabute Bencoelene, surarahe Adene*”.

Tabot Family Harmony (KKT)

In Bengkulu, people involved in the Tabot tradition's ritual are included in the Tabot Family Society (MKT) membership or, more popularly, the Tabot Family Harmony (KKT)—those who inherit and maintain this tradition from generation to generation. In celebrating the Tabot ritual, KKT is also responsible for its implementation in Bengkulu. The descendants of the heirs of the Tabot and the people of Bengkulu carry out the ritual celebration of the Tabot from year to year. Before 1991, the family of the heirs of the Tabot had not been bound into an organisation. However, after that, Bengkulu province was designated as the 24th tourist destination by the Minister of Tourism, Post and Telecommunications in the Development Cabinet V (1988-1993), namely Jenderal TNI (HOR) Soesilo Sudarman. The idea of forming a KKT organisation arose when Bengkulu province was interested in displaying its traditional arts or culture, so Bengkulu displayed the Tabot with its *dol*. The Tabot figures then consulted and officially formed KKT as an organisation in 1993 and had a notarial deed.⁶⁵ The organisation's purpose is to organise and manage the celebration of the Tabot and preserve the Tabot in Bengkulu in a particular.⁶⁶

Thus, the Tabot Inheritance Family Organization called the Bancoolen Tabot Harmony Family, Bengkulu Province, the Bancoolen KKT, is not limited to the Descendant Families of the heirs of the Tabot makers but has become a Community-Based Organization in the Field of Culture and Tradition.

The organisation's symbol contains the spirit and purpose of establishing KKT. The KKT emblem is: Dhol and the *Prisai Jari-Jari Tiga Serangkai*, along with the *Anting-Anting*, a duplicate of the *Pedang Zulfikar* in the shape's background of the Tabot of Bancoolen. Each of these meanings has a meaning.

- a. As a symbol, Dhol turns war drums into art drums that reverberate throughout the country and abroad. The symbol of the top of the *puncak rebung* on the dhol means “Art of Dhol Tabot” and can develop quickly as the rapid growth of bamboo embryo shoots.
- b. The duplicate of Zulfikar’s Sword means that Bancoolen KKT must have a strong determination like that sword to preserve the Tabot Cultural Tradition and in its development and for the utilisation of Tabot culture for the benefit of the people, especially the children of Bancoolen Country.
- c. *Jari-Jari Tiga Serangkai Sejalan* means that the Bancoolen KKT, in preserving, developing and utilising the Tabot Cultural Arts, must work together with the government and/or local government and related concerned parties in line with government and/or local government programs in the fields of culture, tourism and the creative economy.
- d. *Ujud Tabot Bancoolen* is a will as a gift and blessing for the tourism assets of the Bengkulu Province.

The Process and Way of the Tabot Customary Acculturation with Bengkulu Muslim Traditions

Thus, the Tabot Inheritance Family Organization called the Bancoolen Tabot Harmony Family, Bengkulu Province, the Bancoolen KKT, is not limited to the Descendant Families of the heirs of the Tabot makers but has become a Community-Based Organization in the Field of Culture and Tradition.

As the capital city of Bengkulu province, Bengkulu City is inhabited by a heterogeneous population with ethnic and occupational diversity. In Bengkulu, there are Lembak (Bulang) tribes who live around Pagar Dewa, Panorama, Tanjung Jaya and Tanjung Agung.

In addition, on the coast (Segara Bay district), the Malabro area, Tapak Padri, Bengkulu MTabotet, Nala, Kepiri Village, Pondok Besi. In this area, the dominant ethnic group of Bengkulu City is domiciled; the rest in other areas are more ethnic immigrants.

The immigrants in the city of Bengkulu came from areas outside the province of Bengkulu, such as the Minang tribe from West Sumatra, while from South Sumatra, there were the Lembak, Pasemah, and Lintang tribes. In addition, there are also Batak, Javanese, Sundanese, and Bugis tribes. In addition, there are also local tribes from within the Bengkulu province, such as the Rejang, Serawai, and Kaur tribes.

Bengkulu is one of the migration destinations from regions/districts outside the city and even outside the province of Bengkulu. This makes the population of the city of Bengkulu very pluralist and heterogeneous. The plurality of the population of Bengkulu city and even Bengkulu province can be seen in the language aspect used by the community. Various provinces in Indonesia have their own 'unity' language. The people of Aceh have the Acehnese language, West Sumatra with Minang language, Java with the Javanese language, Sundanese and so on. However, in Bengkulu, this is not the case. Out of nine districts and one city, all of them have their language that people outside their community cannot understand.

After looking at the field data and reading the history and ecology of Bengkulu, the contestation of local cultural nuances, pre-Islamic beliefs and religions and Islamic nuances in the Tabot tradition, there are three patterns: integration/assimilation, accommodation, and independence. This is based on the analysis we did with the acculturation theory of religion and culture offered by Berry:⁶⁷



Figure 3.

**The Tabot Tradition Acculturation Pattern
with Bengkulu Muslim Traditions**

The pattern of accommodative relationships between local culture, pre-Islamic beliefs and religions with Islam is the physical structure of the Tabot. If you look at the physical structure of the Tabot with terraces, it does not rule out the possibility of assimilation of various cultures, such as the nuances of the terraced building, like a house of worship in Balinese society. Likewise, Arabic ornaments (calligraphy and Persian nuances) can be found in the physical structure of the Tabot. This is possible because, as is known in the history of religious life in Indonesia, Islam is a religion that came later, after the phases of Hinduism and Buddhism. It is important to remember that this does not mean that the Tabot tradition is a Hindu-Buddhist heritage because the nuances of the Islamic spirit are quite clear in the Tabot tradition. The problem (if it exists and is considered a problem) is that there are nuances of religion other than Islam in the physical building, it does not mean adopting it directly, as the gate building of the Kudus mosque, the style is building from a pre-Islamic religion in Indonesia.

This is where the position of Islam is accommodative to various things that do not conflict with Islam.

The integration/assimilation between pre-Islamic and Islamic nuances in the symbolic Tabot is *Gerga*. *Gerga* is a fusion of Islam and pre-Islam, which blends into a local symbol as there is information about *Gerga* that is worth reading as a reference to make assumptions, namely what was written by Keene, who wrote that in Hinduism there is a special room where the statue of Lord Krishna is called *Garbhagrha*.⁶⁸

Gerga may be an assimilation or metamorphosis of the word *Garbhagrha*, - *Gerga* comes from the word *Garbhagrha* - because of the local dialect of the language in an area so that the word *Garbhagrha* becomes *Gerga*. This does not mean that *Gerga* is part of Hinduism; it's just that it is known that Islam spread to Indonesia after Hinduism, thus allowing what existed before it to be assimilated with Islam as the model and method of da'wah practised by the Wali Songo in Java, which changed art, traditions that existed before Islam were replaced with Islamic teachings (the art and stories of *wayang kulit* by Sunan Kalijaga, as well as *gamelan* changed by Sunan Bonang).

Some symbols in the Independent Tabot tradition are *Penja* representing Husein bin Ali and *Seroban*. *Penja* is a local symbol that does not come from anywhere and is not influenced by pre-Islamic and Islamic nuances that enter and develop in Bengkulu. Symbols with Islamic nuances remain in an independent condition, namely the symbol of the *Seroban* (sorban), which is a product of Arab culture used by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. While the symbol of Husein bin Ali appears in the banner used in carrying out the Tabot tradition.

Conclusion

The Tabot tradition in Bengkulu is a religious tradition because of the long-standing process of religious-cultural acculturation until now. In our genealogical search, the Tabot custom is a group of immigrants in Bengkulu who came from Indian Punjab and underwent many acculturation processes from their home country (Middle East). Arriving in Bengkulu, the Tabot custom made adaptations to local culture and the surrounding community but still preserved the traditions from generation to generation. This study found that the Tabot custom used an integration strategy to acculturate with Bengkulu culture and society. The Tabot tradition in Bengkulu is purely cultural and should commemorate the struggle of al-Husein and the spread of Islamic teachings in Indonesia, especially in Bengkulu. Focusing on celebrating the Islamic new year (*muharram*), the Tabot has also been celebrated in Pariaman, Aceh, Singapore, and Thailand. However, many think that the Tabot is a strategy carried out by the Shi'a group through cultural acculturation. However, this argument needs to be proven empirically in further research. This research is limited to the Tabot custom tradition personally but has not touched on other aspects. The suggestions and recommendations for further research are related to an economic approach where during the celebration of the Tabot custom, the Bengkulu province destination increased dramatically and efforts for local economic development were also lifted.

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Endnotes:

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