

PERSIAN CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON THE EARLY ISLAMIZATION OF SAMUDERA PASAI: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of Persian culture on the early Islamization of Samudera Pasai by integrating fragmented scholarly perspectives into a comprehensive analytical framework. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, this research analyzes 44 selected studies published between 2015 and 2025 from major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The findings reveal that Persian cultural influence operated through interconnected dimensions involving maritime trade networks, intellectual and manuscript transmission, Sufi spiritual networks, material culture, and processes of localization. Intellectual and Sufi networks emerged as the most transformative dimensions, particularly in shaping epistemological structures, religious consciousness, and Islamic intellectual traditions in the Malay world. The study also identifies Samudera Pasai as a strategic nodal hub within transregional Islamic networks, functioning not only as a recipient of Persianate influence but also as an active center for the redistribution and localization of Islamic knowledge across the Malay Archipelago. This study concludes that Islamization in Samudera Pasai was not a linear or solely trade-driven process, but rather a multidimensional historical transformation shaped by cultural negotiation, intellectual exchange, and local agency. By integrating economic, intellectual, spiritual, and cultural perspectives within a single framework, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Islamization in Southeast Asia and advances the application of systematic literature review methods in historical and cultural studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamization of Southeast Asia has long been understood as a complex and multidimensional historical process shaped by maritime connectivity, cultural interaction, and intellectual exchange. The Islamization of the Malay Archipelago did not occur primarily through military conquest, but rather through a gradual and negotiated

process facilitated by long-distance trade networks across the Indian Ocean world (Guillot, 2020; Mukerjee, 2022; Reid, 2015). Within this context, Samudera Pasai emerged as one of the earliest Islamic polities, strategically positioned within transregional networks connecting the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Wiryomartono, 2025).

Recent scholarship highlights the importance of Persianate networks in shaping these historical transformations. The concept of the Persianate world, as articulated by (Hodgson, 1974), provides a critical framework for understanding how Persian language, literary traditions, and intellectual systems circulated beyond Iran and influenced Islamic societies across regions. This perspective is further supported by studies on mobility and diaspora in the Indian Ocean, which demonstrate how transregional Muslim communities facilitated the diffusion of religious and cultural practices (Chabrowski, 2022; Ricci, 2019). In the Malay world, these influences are visible in manuscript traditions, intellectual discourse, and early Islamic institutions (Chuan, 2024; Daneshgar, 2022).

In addition to intellectual transmission, the spread of Islamic ideas was closely linked to social and cultural networks embedded in trade systems. Research shows that Muslim communities, including Persian affiliated actors, functioned as mediators of religious knowledge and social norms within cosmopolitan port cities (Paul, 2023). These dynamics were further reinforced by Sufi networks, which played a central role in disseminating metaphysical teachings and facilitating the internalization of Islamic beliefs (Husen, 2021; Zarrabi-Zadeh, 2024). At the same time, material culture provides tangible evidence of transregional influence, as seen in gravestones and artistic motifs that reflect broader Islamic aesthetic traditions (Ismail et al., 2023, 2024).

Despite these advances, existing scholarship remains methodologically compartmentalized across disciplines. Studies often focus separately on trade (Mukerjee, 2022), intellectual traditions (Daneshgar, 2022), Sufism (Husen, 2021), or material culture (Ismail et al., 2024), without integrating these dimensions into a unified analytical framework. Moreover, recent discussions emphasize the importance of local agency in shaping Islamization, arguing that external influences were actively reinterpreted within local contexts (Fadhil & Imtyas, 2023; Milner, 2023; Oktia & Seprina, 2023). However, the specific role of Persian cultural influence within this process remains insufficiently synthesized.

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) guided by PRISMA protocols to synthesize and critically evaluate existing scholarship on the topic (Page et al., 2021) to integrate diverse strands of scholarship on Persian cultural influence in the early Islamization of Samudera Pasai. By examining trade networks, intellectual transmission, Sufi traditions, and material culture within a single analytical framework, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamization unfolded as a multidimensional and network-based process. In doing so, it also contributes to broader discussions on cultural transformation, identity formation, and social change within the Islamic world (Fouladiyan et al., 2026; Syahidin et al., 2024; Usman, 2024).

METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework to examine Persian cultural influence on the early Islamization of Samudera Pasai (Page et al., 2021). The review was conducted across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant scholarly publications. The search process focused on studies published between 2015 and 2025 using combinations of keywords related to Persian culture, Persianate networks, Islamization, Samudera Pasai, Aceh, and Southeast Asia. Boolean operators and related thematic terms, such as Sufi networks, manuscript transmission, and Islamic trade networks, were applied to improve the precision and relevance of the search results (Donthu et al., 2021; Kraus et al., 2020).

The study selection process followed the four stages of the PRISMA 2020 protocol: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021). A total of 900 records were initially identified from multiple sources, and duplicate records were subsequently removed. Titles and abstracts were screened based on thematic relevance, geographical focus, and conceptual alignment with the research objectives. Full-text assessments were then conducted to evaluate methodological rigor, historical relevance, and explicit discussion of Persian cultural influence. After

applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 44 studies were selected for the final synthesis. The complete selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram.

Data extraction and analysis were conducted using a thematic qualitative approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Key information from each study, including research objectives, methodological approaches, geographical focus, and principal findings, was systematically categorized and analyzed. The synthesis emphasized recurring themes related to maritime trade networks, intellectual and manuscript transmission, Sufi influence, material culture, and localization processes. To enhance the credibility of the review, each study was evaluated based on methodological rigor, relevance to the research topic, and the use of primary historical sources. The findings were synthesized using a qualitative narrative approach to facilitate interdisciplinary interpretation and conceptual integration of the selected studies (Popay et al., 2006).

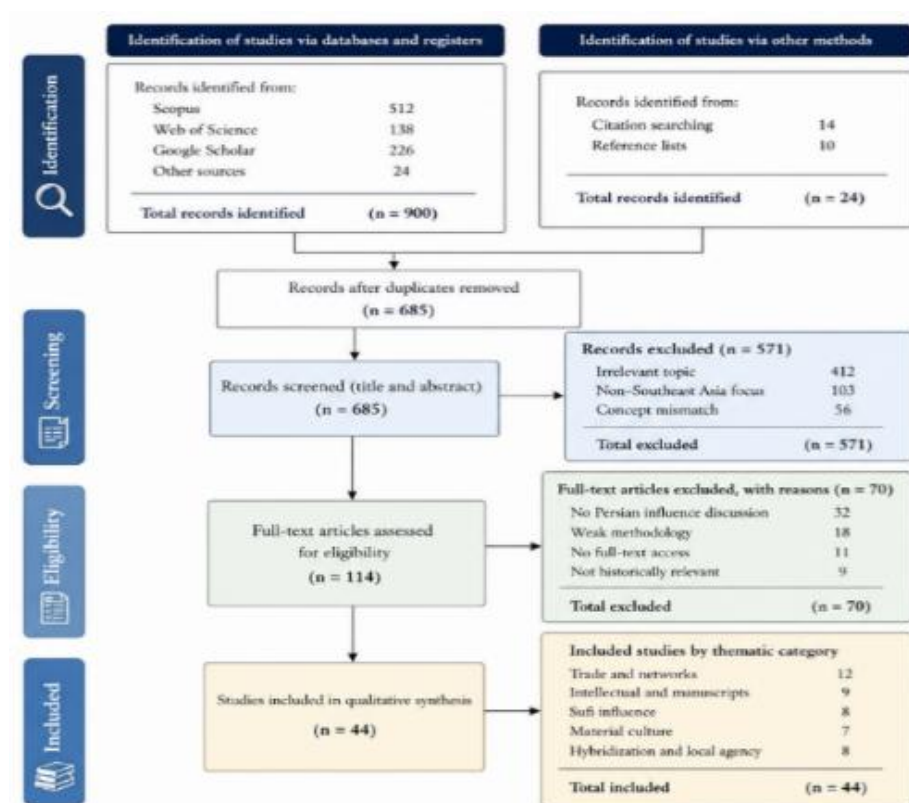


Figure 1. PRISMA

Source: Data Processed by the author, (2026)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Trade, Intellectual, and Sufi Networks in the Islamization of Samudera Pasai

The findings demonstrate that Persianate maritime networks played a significant role in the Islamization of Samudera Pasai and the wider Malay Archipelago. Existing scholarship consistently identifies Indian Ocean trade routes as major channels connecting the Persian Gulf, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, enabling the circulation not only of commodities but also of religious ideas, intellectual traditions, and sociocultural practices associated with Islam (Guillot, 2020; Mukerjee, 2022). Within these interconnected networks, Samudera Pasai emerged as an important intermediary node where external Islamic influences were introduced and localized within Malay society.

The reviewed studies further indicate that Persian merchants functioned not merely as economic actors but also as cultural intermediaries. Maritime trade facilitated gradual interaction through commercial exchange, intermarriage, and the establishment of Muslim communities, creating favorable conditions for the spread of Islam in coastal regions (Reid, 2015). This finding reinforces broader interpretations of Islamization in Southeast Asia as a negotiated and network-based historical transformation rather than a process driven primarily by military expansion.

Beyond economic exchange, the literature highlights the importance of Persianate intellectual traditions in shaping early Islamic epistemologies in the Malay world. Manuscript-based studies reveal significant Persian linguistic, literary, and theological influences in early Malay Islamic writings (Chuan, 2024; Daneshgar, 2022). Persian narrative traditions, Sufi metaphysical concepts, and Persian derived terminologies were incorporated into local Islamic texts, indicating that Islamization involved not only religious conversion but also intellectual and epistemological transformation.

This intellectual transmission is particularly evident in the development of Sufi traditions. Studies on Hamzah Fansuri and the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* demonstrate strong connections between Malay Islamic thought and Persian metaphysical traditions (Chuan, 2024; Husen, 2021). Sufi networks facilitated the mobility of scholars, manuscripts, and spiritual teachings across the Indian Ocean world, allowing Islamic ideas to be internalized within local sociocultural contexts. These findings support arguments that Islamization in Southeast Asia was shaped through intellectual and spiritual engagement alongside commercial interaction (Ricci, 2019).

Importantly, the reviewed literature also emphasizes the role of local agency in mediating external influences (Milner, 2023). Persian intellectual and religious traditions were not passively adopted but actively reinterpreted according to local sociocultural conditions. This process produced hybrid forms of Islamic thought that combined Persianate elements with indigenous Malay traditions, demonstrating that Islamization in Samudera Pasai was characterized by negotiation, adaptation, and localization rather than unidirectional cultural transfer.

Table 1. Synthesis of Trade, Intellectual, and Sufi Networks

Authors	Focus	Main Findings
Guillot (2020)	Persian-Malay trade relations	Maritime trade facilitated religious and intellectual exchange
Mukerjee (2022) Daneshgar (2022)	Indian Ocean trade networks Early Malay Islamic manuscripts	Samudera Pasai functioned as a transregional trade hub Persian linguistic and theological influences shaped Malay texts
Husen (2021)	Sufi traditions and <i>wahdat al-wujud</i>	Persian metaphysical thought influenced Malay Islamic discourse
Chuan (2024)	Persian epistemological traditions	Persianate intellectual traditions shaped Malay Islamic knowledge

Source: Data Processed by the author, (2026)

Material Culture and Localization Processes

Material culture provides further evidence of Persian cultural influence in the Islamization of Samudera Pasai. Archaeological and artistic studies identify Persian stylistic elements in gravestones, inscriptions, and decorative traditions across the Malay Archipelago (Ismail et al., 2023, 2024). These findings suggest that Persian influence extended beyond intellectual and religious domains into visual and symbolic expressions of Islamic culture.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that early Islamic gravestones display stylistic similarities with broader Persianate artistic traditions, particularly in ornamental motifs and calligraphic forms (Ismail et al., 2023). Such evidence indicates that artistic conventions circulated through the same transregional networks that facilitated trade and intellectual exchange. Material culture therefore functioned not only as a medium of cultural transmission but also as a marker of emerging Islamic identity in the Malay world.

The findings also reveal significant processes of localization and hybridization. Persian artistic and intellectual elements were selectively adapted into local cultural frameworks, producing distinctive forms of Malay Islamic

expression. Studies on Malay woodcarving traditions demonstrate the incorporation of Turco-Persian motifs into vernacular artistic forms while preserving indigenous aesthetic characteristics (Ismail et al., 2024). Similarly, local scholars reinterpreted Persian intellectual traditions according to local epistemological and sociocultural contexts (Chuan, 2024).

These findings reinforce arguments emphasizing the importance of local agency in shaping Islamization processes in Southeast Asia (Milner, 2023). Islamization was not simply the passive reception of external influences but a dynamic process involving reinterpretation, negotiation, and synthesis. This perspective challenges diffusionist historiography by demonstrating that local communities actively participated in constructing Islamic identity within their own cultural contexts.

Table 2. Synthesis of Material Culture and Localization

Authors	Focus	Main Findings
Ismail et al. (2023)	Islamic gravestones and inscriptions	Persianate artistic influences appear in Malay Islamic material culture
Ismail et al. (2024)	Malay woodcarving traditions	Turco-Persian motifs were localized into vernacular artistic forms
Milner (2023)	Islamization and local agency	Local societies actively negotiated Islamic influences
Chuan (2024)	Localization of Persian intellectual traditions	Persian epistemologies were adapted into Malay contexts

Source: Data Processed by the author, (2026)

Samudera Pasai as a Transregional Islamic Hub

The synthesis of findings positions Samudera Pasai as a strategic nodal hub within broader transregional Islamic networks connecting the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia (Guillot, 2020; Mukerjee, 2022). Its geographical location enabled sustained interaction among merchants, scholars, and religious communities, facilitating the circulation of trade goods, manuscripts, intellectual traditions, and Islamic cultural practices across the Indian Ocean world.

The reviewed studies demonstrate that Samudera Pasai functioned not merely as a passive recipient of Islamic influence but as an active center for the redistribution and localization of Islamic knowledge within the Malay Archipelago. Through these interactions, Persian cultural elements were continuously negotiated and transformed within local sociocultural contexts. This finding supports contemporary scholarship that conceptualizes Islamization as a multidimensional and network-based historical transformation rather than a linear process of cultural diffusion (Reid, 2015; Ricci, 2019).

Integrated Discussion and Academic Contribution

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Persian influence on the Islamization of Samudera Pasai operated through interconnected processes involving maritime trade, intellectual transmission, Sufi networks, material culture, and local adaptation (Milner, 2023; Ricci, 2019). Collectively, these dimensions shaped the formation of early Islamic society in the Malay world.

This study contributes to existing scholarship by addressing the fragmentation of previous studies, which often examined trade networks, manuscript traditions, Sufi thought, or material culture independently (Chuan, 2024; Daneshgar, 2022). By integrating these dimensions within a systematic literature review framework, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how Persianate networks influenced religious and cultural transformation in Southeast Asia.

The findings further demonstrate that Islamization in Samudera Pasai was neither linear nor unidirectional. Instead, it involved complex processes of negotiation, adaptation, and hybridization shaped by continuous interaction between transregional Islamic networks and local sociocultural dynamics (Reid, 2015; Ricci, 2019). Consequently,

the Islamization of the Malay world should be understood as a multidimensional historical transformation shaped by both global connectivity and local agency (Milner, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Persian cultural influence on the Islamization of Samudera Pasai was multidimensional and shaped through the interaction of maritime trade networks, intellectual and manuscript traditions, Sufi spiritual networks, material culture, and processes of localization. The findings indicate that intellectual and Sufi networks played a more substantial role than previously emphasized, particularly in shaping epistemological structures and spiritual life within early Malay Islamic society. These findings challenge interpretations that primarily position trade as the dominant mechanism of Islamization by showing that the process also involved intellectual transformation, cultural negotiation, and active local agency. Furthermore, the position of Samudera Pasai as a nodal hub within transregional Islamic networks demonstrates its role not merely as a recipient of external influence, but also as an active center for the circulation, adaptation, and transformation of Islamic knowledge across the Malay Archipelago.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing an integrated synthesis of previously fragmented scholarship through the combination of perspectives from economic history, intellectual traditions, Sufi studies, and material culture within a unified analytical framework. The findings reinforce contemporary scholarship that conceptualizes Islamization as a multidimensional and network-based historical transformation while challenging reductionist explanations centered exclusively on economic or political factors. In addition, this study proposes a more comprehensive perspective on the interaction between Persianate influences and local sociocultural dynamics, thereby contributing to broader discussions on cultural transmission, hybridity, and Islamic intellectual history in Southeast Asia.

Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on secondary sources and existing literature, which may reflect uneven disciplinary coverage and interpretative bias. The concentration on Samudera Pasai as a specific historical context also restricts the broader generalizability of the findings. Future research is therefore encouraged to incorporate primary sources, including manuscripts, archaeological evidence, and field-based historical data, in order to deepen empirical understanding of Islamization processes in Southeast Asia. Comparative and interdisciplinary approaches integrating history, anthropology, archaeology, and digital humanities are also recommended to expand theoretical and methodological perspectives in the study of Islamization.

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