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# The Rise and Decline of Chinese Sultanates in Java

Wing-Sheung CHENG<sup>1,2</sup>

1. Retired Professor, Department of History, National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan.
2. [鄭永常]

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## Abstract

Scholars of Indonesian history seldom discuss the historical changes that occurred on the north coast of Java between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, between the fall of Majapahit and the rise of Mataram. This can be attributed, in part, to the lack of surviving historical materials, and in part to a reluctance to mention the influence of Chinese Muslims on the Islamization of Java. In this article, the author hopes to explore this important period in Javanese history. Relying on *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cirebon*, Sanusi Pane's *Sedjarah Indonesia (History of Indonesia)*, and related studies, it seeks to reconstruct the Chinese Sultanates established on Java's north coast between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. It will focus its discussion and analysis on the rise and fall of Demak, Pajang, Cirebon, and Banten.

**Keywords:** Zheng He, Bong Swie-Hoo (Sunan Ampel), Chinese Muslims, Chinese Sultanates, Islamization of Java

## 1 Introduction

In 1999, a year after the fall of President Suharto, Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009) became Indonesia’s first elected president. He had been born into a devout Muslim family, with both his father and his grandfather being famous clerics. Further back, he traced his ancestry to Syekh Abdul Qadir Tan Kiem-Han (陳金漢), an early Muslim leader in Indonesia, and through him to Fujian Chinese who had settled in Surabaya while Admiral Zheng He (鄭和) was sailing to the *West Ocean*<sup>1</sup> around 1405–1433 (Chong, [2015](#)). This means that President Wahid’s family has been living in Java since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a time—according to the Chinese history *Yingya Shenglan* (瀛涯勝覽), written by Zheng He’s interpreter Ma Huan (馬歡)—when thousands of Chinese (including some Muslims) were living in cities such as Tuban, Gresik, Surabaya, and Palembang<sup>2</sup> (Ma, [1617/1962](#), pp. 9–11; 16–17).

Further documentation is provided by a Malay-language historical record, *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, which was found by a Dutch colonial officer named Poortman in a Chinese temple in 1928. This document records the activities of Muslim Chinese along the northern coast of Java between 1368 and 1585. Parlindungan, an Indonesian scholar and student of Poortman, was fortunate to see the copy of this historical material, which he appended to his [1962](#) book *Tuanku Rao*; owing to its sensitive subject matter, Parlindungan was blacklisted by the Indonesian government. Another Indonesian historian, Slamet Muljana, published *Runtuhnja Keradjaan Hindu-Djawa dan Timbulnya Negara-negara Islam di Nusantara* [The Fall of Hindu-Javanese Kingdoms and the Rise of Islamic Nations in the Archipelago] in [1968](#); he also quoted *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, and agreed with its content, and was thus similarly blacklisted (D. S. Chen, [2003](#), pp. 86–91). In his subsequent book *A Story of Majapahit*, published in Singapore in [1976](#), Slamet Muljana also cited materials from *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*.

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1 The “West Ocean” [西洋] includes the northern part of Sumatra, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and northeastern Africa.

2 杜板、革兒惜/新村、泗水及巴鄰邦/舊港/巨港



In 1974, the Dutch scholars H. J. de Graaf and Th. Pigeaud published *De eerste moslimse vorstendommen op Java: Studiën over de staatkundige geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de eeuw* [The First Muslim Principalities of Java: A Political History of the 15th and 16th Centuries]. They wrote that, at first, they had been bewildered by *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* and thus ignored it. They subsequently came to regard it as worthy, and investigated it; however, they died before their study could be completed (Ricklefs, 1984, p. v). Only in 1984 was an English-language translation available; titled *Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15th and 16th centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, it was edited by M. C. Ricklefs and published together with the research of Pigeaud and de Graaf by Monash University. The prominent Professor Wang Gungwu (王賡武) wrote that he had once doubted Chinese Muslims' involvement in introducing Islam to the Malay world, but changed his mind after reading de Graaf's study (D. S. Chen, 2008).

Of course, some scholars have questioned *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, suggesting that it is a fabrication, albeit one based on authentic texts (Wain, 2017). I myself published an academic paper about a Muslim Chinese man named Tan Sam-Cai (陳三才), who is identified in *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* as the Finance Minister of the Cirebon Sultanate in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Cheng, 2019). When he died in 1585, the Sultan of Cirebon denied him interment amongst the elites in Sembung; local Muslims viewed him as a renegade, as he always burned incense at the local Chinese temple. This is the extent of his discussion in *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*. Today, however, Tan Sam-Cai is venerated by Cirebon's Chinese at the Confucian Talang Temple, as he had donated his land to Cirebon's non-Muslim Chinese for use as a cemetery in Cirebon (Cheng, 2019; Franke et al., 1997). According to *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Indonesia* edited by Franke et al. (1997), the names Tan Sam-Cai (陳三才) and Sam Cai Kong (三才公) are mentioned at least five times in materials from Cirebon (pp. 190–250). This study of Tan Sam-Cai suggests that *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* are not necessarily false. At the same time, the author agrees with M. C. Ricklefs' conclusion that "this text has clearly been through the hands of various editors or fabricators" (Ricklefs, 1984, p. vi). Nevertheless, it offers us historical materials that we can use to reconstruct Java in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* record the history of Muslim Chinese in the Indonesian archipelago between 1368 and 1585 (Ricklefs, 1984). It thus offers a useful tool for understanding Muslim Chinese life in Java in the 15th and 16th centuries, as well as for reconstructing the fall of Majapahit and the rise of Chinese Sultanates in Demak, Pajang, Banten and Cirebon. For this article, the author has also consulted the Chinese-language translation of *Sedjarah*

*Indonesia (History of Indonesia)*, which was written by Sanusi Pane in 1950. As noted by the book's Indonesian author, it is intended as "a guide on the history of Indonesia, and its focus is on providing information" (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 2). Also useful in writing this paper has been *Ancient History of Indonesia*, written by Wang Ren-Shu.<sup>3</sup> I have noted a gap in the history of Indonesia between the fall of Majapahit and the rise of Mataram; I expect that *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* will help us fill it.

## 2 Zheng He and the Chinese Community in Indonesia

Ma Huan mentioned that trade ports such as Tuban, Gresik, and Surabaya, all located on the northern coast of eastern Java, had sizable Chinese communities. Driven predominantly by mercantile interests, these communities traced their heritage predominantly to the Guangdong and Fujian (Zhangzhou and Quanzhou) regions (Ma, [1617/1962](#), p. 11). In matters of religion, these communities generally fell into two categories: Muslim and traditional Chinese. Inter-marriage with local women was common and produced what would later become the *peranakan* Chinese (土生華人). In Palembang, Zheng He detained the port master Tjen Tsu-Ji (陳祖義), a non-Muslim whom he deemed a pirate leader (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 13). Afterwards, Zheng He installed a Muslim port master, Shi Jin-Qing (施進卿).<sup>4</sup> However, Shi was not really loyal to the Ming Dynasty, but to Majapahit, and after his death his daughter Shi Er-Jie (施二姐)<sup>5</sup> became the leader of Palembang (Cheng, [2011](#), pp. 113–116). Her adopted son, Sunan Giri, later known as Raden Paku, was one of the nine sages of Indonesian Islam (Y. S. Chen, [1983](#), pp. 109–117). The author of *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* thus identified Palembang as the first Hanafi Muslim Chinese community (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 14).

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3 Wang Ren-Shu [王任叔] was an underground member of the Communist Party of China. He worked in Singapore and Indonesia for seven or eight years, from 1941 to 1948. In 1950, he became the first ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Indonesia in 1950. In 1952, he returned to China and immersed himself in the study of Indonesian history.

4 I must note here that Tjen Tsu-Ji had not been a pirate, but an *adipati* (governor) installed by the King of Majapahit. As such, it was impossible for Shi Jin-Qing to maintain full loyalty to the Ming government; he had to negotiate between the two regimes.

5 According to Singaporean scholar Chen Yu-Song ([1983](#)), Shi Er-Jie came from a Muslim family who had controlled foreign trade in Palembang and communicated with the King of the Ryukyu.



Zheng He did not completely trust these oversea Chinese, including the non-Muslim ones who had inhabited the archipelago since before the Ming Dynasty. Therefore, he dispatched religious leaders from Yunnan (雲南) to lead them. *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* emphasize that, between 1365 to 1368, China dispatched many Yunnan Muslims (who followed the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam) as officials in Southeast Asia (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 13). However, *the Annals* suggest that, in many cases, these “officials” functioned more as religious or technical leaders who guided local Chinese (both Muslim and non-Muslim). In this manner, they sought to establish auxiliary ports for Zheng He and other Chinese explorers.

According to *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, Zheng He in 1413 installed Bong Tak-Keng<sup>6</sup> in Campa<sup>7</sup> as the leader of the Muslim Chinese in Southeast Asia (Ricklefs, 1984). Bong Tak-Keng ordered Gan Eng-Tju (顏英祖) to Manila (馬尼拉), where he led the Muslim Chinese community until he was transferred to Tuban in 1423. While in Tuban, Gan Eng-Tju was appointed port master by the King of Majapahit, and in this capacity he managed both foreign trade and the Muslim Chinese community. Gan Eng-Tju also established Muslim Chinese communities throughout Java, including in Antjol, Tjirebon/Cerbon, Lasem, Gerisik/Jinshi, Djiaotong, Modjokerto, and Semarang<sup>8</sup> (pp. 14–15).

These Muslim-Chinese communities built mosques as centers of their religious activities. *Yingya Shenglan* (瀛涯勝覽) records three types of people in the trade ports of East Java. The first, from western lands (from Persia, India, and Arabia), were predominantly businessmen; all were Muslim. The second, identified as *Tangren* (唐人), came from Fujian (Quanzhou, Zhangzhou) and Guangdong (Guangzhou); some were Muslim. The third were the indigenous peoples, who were animist, Hindu, or Buddhist, and lived predominantly in rural areas (Ma, 1617/1962, p. 11).

In 1433, Zheng He died. His fleet stopped its travels, and the Ming Dynasty interrupted its relationship with the Muslim Chinese in Java. What happened, then, to the Chinese Community? Some Muslim Chinese transformed their mosques into Chinese temples, dedicated to Sam Bo Kong (三寶公), who was implied to be the god of Zheng He. After the death of Gan Eng-Tju, Bong Swie-Hoo (黃瑞和)—the grandson of Bong Tak-Keng, and the husband of Gan Eng-Tju’s daughter—became the leader of Muslim Chinese, and took the initiative to

6 “Bong Tak-Keng” and the other Chinese names recorded in *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* are from the Hokkien dialect of Chinese. “Bong Tak-Keng” is the translation of “黃達京” used by D. S. Chen (2003, pp. 91–104).

7 Also known as Champa or “占城”.

8 安作兒、井里汶、拉森、錦石、焦東、莫多哥多及三寶壟

teach Islam to the Javanese. Bong Swie-Hoo moved to Ngampel/Ampel (near Surabaya), where he established a Javanese Muslim community (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 21). Bong Swie-Hoo had several sons, one of whom (subsequently called Sunan Bonang) who undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca but studied under a Persian leader in Malacca. Later, circa the 17th century, Bong Swie-Hoo (known as Sunan Ampel) and his son Sunan Bonang became venerated as Muslim sages (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 148).

By the 15th century, Majapahit's power had waned. It became a landlocked kingdom, one which retained its Hindu-Buddhist beliefs. It also maintained control of central Java and eastern Java, as well as lesser influence on western Java and Palembang. Nonetheless, its power continued to decline. On the northern coast of Java, the Chinese had established many important trading ports. During this period, ethnic Chinese men of wealth and status would marry their daughters to members of the royal family, often emphasizing their heritage despite the fact that they were not born in China (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 22; 41). This enabled them to establish political power and expand their influence. The first Sultan of Demak (淡目), a half-blood Chinese named Raden Patah (Jin Bun<sup>9</sup>), was the product of one such coupling.

### 3 The Demak Sultanate [淡目王國] (1475–1546)

The establishment of the Demak Sultanate was inexorably related to Swan Liong (孫龍), the adoptive father of Raden Patah. A *Peranakan* man who had once served as the general manager of the Semarang gunpowder factory, Swan Liong is recorded in *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* as having been born in Modjokerto (the capital of Majapahit) to King Yang Wi Si Sa (i.e. Hyang Wisesa or Wikramawardhana, r. 1389–1427) (Muljana, [1976](#), p. 240; Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 22). According to the Indonesian scholar Slamet Muljana, Swan Liong (known in Javanese as Damar) was appointed Governor of Palembang by the King of Majapahit in 1443 (Muljana, [1976](#), pp. 241–242). At the same time, *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* records that Swan Liong was appointed by Gan Eng-Tju to lead the Muslim Chinese community in Palembang<sup>10</sup> and protect them from pirate raids (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 18). This shows that a working relationship existed between King of Majapahit and the leader of the Muslim Chinese; when the king appointed a half-blood Chinese as an official, this individual was also appointed as the leader of the local Muslim community.

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9 “Jin Bun” is the translation of “靳文” used by D. S. Chen ([2003](#), p. 95).

10 Also known as Kukang or “舊港”.



When Swan Liong travelled to Palembang, he brought with him a pregnant Chinese noblewoman who had been abandoned by the children's father. In Palembang, this woman gave birth to two boys: Jin Bun<sup>11</sup> and Kin San (金山)<sup>12</sup>. Jin Bun, a devout Muslim, subsequently founded the Demak Sultanate and became renowned under the Javanese name Raden Patah. Kin San, who unlike his elder brother could speak Chinese (specifically, the Hokkien dialect) served as Governor of Semarang (三寶壟) for nearly fifty years (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 27).

### 1. The First Sultan of Demak: Jin Bun [靳文] (Raden Patah) (r. 1475–1518)

Jin Bun was a devout Muslim. In 1474, at the age of thirty, he travelled to Semarang with his brother, Kin San. He is said to have wept upon seeing the idol of Sam Po Kong (三寶公) in the mosque, praying to Allah, and asking Him for the strength to build a better mosque in Semarang (Muljana, 1976, p. 240; Ricklefs, 1984, p. 23). In 1475, the Muslim Chinese leader Bong Swie-Hoo (黃瑞和), tasked him with establishing a community in east of Semarang. In 1474, his father Kung Ta Bu Mi (Bhre Kertabhumi) became King of Majapahit and appointed Jin Bun Governor of Demak, making him both a religious and governmental leader (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 23).

The Indonesian historian Sanusi Pane writes that, according to legend, the first king of Demak was Raden Patah, the son of the King of Majapahit and a Chinese princess. He was born in Palembang, and travelled to Demak as an adult, where he was appointed Governor of Demak by the King of Majapahit. Over time, however, he became a foe of Majapahit (Pane, 1950/1980, p. 226). In *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, it is suggested that Jin Bun was Raden Patah (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 23).

<sup>11</sup> Jin Bun's father, identified as Kung Ta Bu Mi (Bhre Kertabhumi, r. 1474–1478), became King of Majapahit (Muljana, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Kin San's father was Swan Liong.

Raden Patah (Jin Bun) ruled Demak as a strongman for nearly 40 years. In 1477, he led a large army on a jihad against Semarang, where they seized Sam Bo Kong Temple. However, he did not damage the city or slaughter apostate Muslims (who were shipbuilding technicians) or non-Muslim Chinese (who pledged their loyalty to the Sultanate) (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 24–25). In 1487 after the death of Bong Swie-Hoo<sup>13</sup>, he occupied Ngampel/Ampel and attacked the areas east of it. Together with his brother Jin Shan, Raden Patah seized control of the Majapahit Court, brought back seven carriages full of jewels to Demak, and imprisoned his father (whom he nevertheless treated with respect). However, the Kingdom of Majapahit was quickly recovered by non-Muslim Javanese (pp. 26–27).

During his reign, Raden Patah appointed his younger brother Kin San as Governor of Semarang, a position he held for fifty years. Raden Patah ordered the establishment of a mosque in Semarang. Kin San spoke and understood Chinese, and was tolerant of all races and religions. For example, he entrusted the restoration of the city's sawmill and shipyard to Gan Si-Cang (顏希長), who was perceived as an apostate; he was non-Muslim, despite being the son of Hajji Gan Eng-Tju (顏英祖), the religious leader of the local Muslim Chinese. Gan Si-Cang led the workers in building war and merchant ships that rivalled those of the Ming Dynasty, being capable of carrying more than 400 soldiers or more than 10,000 tons of materials (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 27–28). In 1481, Gan Si-Cang asked Kin San to allow the non-Muslim Chinese to help build the Great Mosque in Demak; this request was approved by Sultan Raden Patah, who recognized their excellent craftsmanship (pp. 29–30).

In 1509, Raden Patah's son Yat Sun (益山) ordered that shipbuilding be expedited in preparation for an attack on Moa Lok Sa (Malacca). In 1512, when Yat Sun led the Demak Navy in its attack on Malacca, he found that the Portuguese had occupied the city<sup>14</sup> (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 28). According to *An Account of the Orient: From the Red Sea to China*, a Chinese translation of an account by the Portuguese apothecary and diplomat Tomé Pires (r. 1465?–1524/1540), Samarang (Semarang) had approximately 3,000 inhabitants c. 1515, and it was no longer producing ships; all of them had been destroyed in 1512, when Yat Sun's fleet had attacked Malacca and been destroyed by the Portuguese (Pires, [1944/2005](#), p. 135; 172). In *Sedjarah Indonesia*, Yat Sun is identified as Pangeran Sabrang Lor, the eldest son of Raden Patah, who led the fleet and attacked Malacca with the aid of Palembang, only to be repulsed by Portugal. Later, he became the second king of Demak (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 227).

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<sup>13</sup> Also known as Sunan Ampel

<sup>14</sup> The Portuguese were described as “red-haired people with long-distance cannons”





In 1513, an Arab man identified as Ja Tik Su came to Semarang for repairing his ship. Kin San and Yat Sun accompanied him to Demak, where he stayed. In *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, it is suggested that Ja Tik Su was Jafar Sadik, also known as Sunan Kudus, who reformed the Islamic practices of the Demak Sultanate between 1513 and 1546, replacing its Hanafi school teachings with Shafi'i ones. It is Ja Tik Su who granted Raden Patah the title of sultan, c. 1513 (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 30–31). In 1517, the Sultan of Demak attacked Majapahit, taking its wealth and glory for Demak. In *Sedjarah Indonesia*, Sanusi Pane (1950/1980) writes that, after Majapahit was defeated, Raden Patah became recognized as the leader of East Java (p. 226); this indicates that Demak was exercising hegemony over the northern coast of Java by 1517. A year later, however, Sultan Raden Patah died at the age of 63. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, he had become venerated as a sage of Indonesian Islam.

## 2. The Second Sultan of Demak: Yat Sun [益山] (Sultan Pati Unus /Pangeran Sabrang Lor) (r. 1518–1521)

In 1518, Yat Sun—the son of Jin Bun (Raden Patah)—ascended to the throne of Demak. In Indonesian history, Yat Sun is identified as Sultan Pati Unus or Pangeran Sabrang Lor (Wang, 1987, p. 708). After his ascendancy, Demak slowly grew weaker. In *An Account of the Orient*, it is narrated that, where Jin Bun could mobilize forty ships, Yat Sun could only mobilize ten (Pires, 1944/2005). He was very young, only about thirty at the time of his ascendancy, and prone to womanizing. In 1521, Sultan Pati Unus led his navy—armed with counterfeit Arabic cannons—in another attack against Malacca, but was killed in action (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 32).

## 3. The Third Sultan of Demak: Tung Ka Lo [董加樂] (Sultan Trenggana/Tranggana) (r. 1521–1546)

After the death of Sultan Pati Unus, the royal family fought for the throne, and Demak fell into civil unrest. *Sedjarah Indonesia* writes that, when Sultan Pati Unus died in 1521, he had no children. Under applicable law, his successor should have been his brother, but he was killed by his nephew Sunan Prawoto. Sunan Prawoto's father Sultan Pangeran [Prince] Trenggana (Tung Ka Lo, or 董加樂)—the second brother of Yat Sun (Sultan Pati Unus)—then took the throne (Pane, 1950/1980, p. 227; Ricklefs, 1984, p. 32). He felt it was necessary to control the western parts of Java, then ruled by the Sundanese, owing to the region's significant pepper production; this was resisted by the Portuguese, who were also trying to control the pepper trade while simultaneously spreading Christianity.

Sultan Trenggana thus ordered his son Fatahillah—identified in *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* as Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 38)—to lead a large navy to capture West Java. By 1527, Commander Fatahillah had invaded and occupied the region's most important ports, including in Banten, Sunda, Jakarta, and Cirebon (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 228).

In the year 1527, after the death of King of Majapahit Pa Bu Ta La (Ranawijaya<sup>15</sup>), Sultan Trenggana ordered his second son Toh A Bo (杜亞寶) to conquer the kingdom (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 33). The royal children of Majapahit, refusing to convert to Islam, fled to Pasuruhan and Panarukan. With the collapse of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom, Islam gradually strengthened in the interior of Java—including in Mataram (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 230).

*Sedjarah Indonesia* records that, around this time, Sultan Trenggana began recognizing the threat posed by Portuguese forces in Malacca (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 230–231). He thus formed an alliance with Johor and Aceh against the Portuguese. At the same time, he seemed to recognize the importance of Banten as a base of trade and power, so thus tried to install his adopted son to the throne. I think, however, that the conqueror of Banten was not Sultan Trenggana's adopted son, but rather Commander Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah, whom I believe is also the individual identified in *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* as Toh A Bo, the second son of Sultan Trenggana.

Between 1541 and 1546, Sultan Trenggana continued to expand his sphere of influence. His bid to capture the Spice Islands (Maluku) was entrusted to his son Muk Ming (慕明), who—with the assistance of the non-Muslim Chinese of Semarang—built thousands of large wooden ships for the navy, each capable of carrying 400 soldiers (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 33–34). In other words, during the reign of Sultan Trenggana, Demak launched an expedition in Java and controlled the northern coast of Java as well as the western part of the island; it also supported Johor and Aceh in their campaign against Portugal. This was a golden age for Demak. However, in 1546, during a battle for Pasuruan in East Java, Sultan Trenggana was killed by a guard (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 231). His son, Muk Ming, inherited the throne as the fourth Sultan of Demak, taking the name Sunan Prawoto (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 33–34).

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15 Prabhu Natha Girindrawardhana Dyah Ranawijaya (Muljana, [1976](#), p. 240)



#### 4. The Fourth Sultan of Demak: Muk Ming [慕明] (Sultan Sunan Prawoto) (r. 1546–1546)

Owing to Demak's excessive military expansion under Sultan Trenggana, the common people lived in suffering. Soon Sunan Prawoto came to the throne, a rebellion broke out, led by Dji Pang Kang (芝邦爺)—the grandson of Sultan Raden Patah (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 33–34). According to *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, Dji Pang Kang attacked Demak and destroyed its shipyards, cities, and palace; only the temples and mosques were spared. Sultan Sunan Prawoto was killed, followed soon afterwards by many of the non-Muslim Chinese. The Demak Kingdom collapsed.

Peng King Kang (鵬京爺), the Governor of Pajang, attacked the rebels and killed Dji Pang Kang. Peng King Kang was also a descendant of Yunan Muslims but was a Shiite. He established a sultanate in the interior of country, one far from the coast (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 35–36). In *Sedjarah Indonesia*, Peng King Kang is identified as Hadiwijaya (Pane, [1950/1980](#)).

#### 5. The Fifth Sultan of Demak: Arya Pangiri (r. 1546–1546)

According to *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, Sultan Sunan Prawoto was killed, and his son Arya Pangiri was designated fifth Sultan of Demak by the religious teacher Dja Tik Su; however, he was killed soon thereafter (Ricklefs, [1984](#), p. 35). There may be issues here; in *Sedjarah Indonesia*, it is narrated that Hadiwijaya (Peng King Kang) appointed Sunan Prawoto's son Arya Pangiri as Governor of Demak, and took him as a son-in-law (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 232). At this time, Demak was a province of Pajang. Although Arya Pangiri was restored as sultan in 1582, his claim was quickly defeated, and the Sultanate of Demak is identified as having fallen in 1546.

## 4 The Sultanate of Pajang [巴章王國] (1546–1586)

### 1. The First Sultan of Pajang: Peng King Kang [鵬京爺] (Hadiwijaya/Mas Karebèt/Joko Tingkir) (r. 1546–1582)

It is said that Hadiwijaya (Joko Tingkir) was descended from the royal family of Majapahit. This appears to be true, as are claims that he was born to a Javanese father and Chinese mother. Nonetheless, he also had strong Shia Muslim beliefs. *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* record him as a Muslim Chinese man from Yunnan (Ricklefs, [1984](#)). Meanwhile, according to *Sedjarah Indonesia*, Hadiwijaya's wife was the fourth daughter of the third Sultan of Demak (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 231). This highlights the relationship between the early Javanese Muslims and the Muslim Chinese.

After the defeat of Demak, he established a Sudanese sultanate, one that encompassed all of Demak's former territories. However, he did not remain on the coast; he returned inland, seeking to promote Shia Islam through Java (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 35–36). Sanusi Pane's *Sedjarah Indonesia* describes Sultan Hadiwijaya as having moved the crown of Majapahit and the national treasures of Demak to his new capital in Pajang (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 233).

Pajang, located in a prime rice cultivation area, became important in the future development of Java's religion and culture. It bridged the old kingdoms of Java with Islam, which at the same time was becoming increasingly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist culture. Islamic mysticism—i.e. Sufism—began to incorporate more and more Buddhist tantric elements, thereby interacting positively with traditional Javanese culture (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 233).

All of Demak's former lands—including Sedayu, Gresik, Surabaya, and Pasuruan—fell under the rule of Pajang. In addition, it also controlled Tuban, Pati, Demak, Malang, Madiun, Buwanda, Banyumas, Grobogan, and Mataram. In other words, Pajang covered almost all of central and eastern Java, with *adipate*, or governors, ruling these areas. Hadiwijaya promoted Shia Islam throughout the land.

Sultan Hadiwijaya adopted Sutawijaya, the son of the Governor of Mataram, as his son. Initially, the king showed great favor to his adopted son, appointing him as the director of religious affairs in 1575 (Wang, [1987](#), p. 754). However, Sutawijaya secretly cultivated rebellious intentions, and Sultan Hadiwijaya had to raise an army against his adopted son. However, Mataram's army was too strong, and Pajang experienced defeat after defeat. Finally, in 1582, Sultan Hadiwijaya (Peng King Kang) was killed. This was the death knell of the Pajang Sultanate (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 233–234).



## 2. The Second Sultan of Pajang: Pangeran Benawa (r. 1582–1586)

After the death of Sultan Hadiwijaya, his son Pangeran [Prince] Benawa became Sultan of Pajang, under the control of Sutawijaya. However, when news of Hadiwijaya's death reached Demak, the nobility installed Arya Pangiri as the fifth Sultan of Demak. Arya Pangiri sent troops to Pajang to seize one-third of its rice fields. In Pajang, feelings were ambivalent; some sought the assistance of Mataram, while others were staunchly opposed. Dispute seemed endless. After four years, Sultan Pangeran [Prince] Benawa asked Sutawijaya to send troops to drive away Demak's forces. This request was approved, and Sutawijaya quickly sent his troops and conquered Pajang. Sutawijaya did not kill Arya Pangiri, and reinstated him as Governor of Demak (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 235).

Pajang's second sultan was unable to maintain dominance, and thus ceded position to Sutawijaya and sent the kingdom's treasures to Mataram. Sutawijaya was the founder of the Mataram Sultanate, an Islamic kingdom that succeeded Pajang as hegemon of Java. After the collapse of Pajang in 1586, various parts of Java declared their independence; this included Demak, which was unsuccessful. Mataram used conquest to maintain control (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 236).

## 5 The Kingdom of Cirebon (1552–1625)

### 1. The First Sultan of Cirebon: Toh A Bo [杜亞寶] (Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah) (r. 1552–1570)

We now turn to the establishment of the Sultanate of Cirebon. According to *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, the fall of Demak upset Commander-in-Chief Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah (who had stayed in Banten) very greatly. After six years of consideration, he surrendered his ruling position in Banten, deeming himself too old to reclaim the lost land. At the same time, however, he was unwilling to accept Pajang's promotion of Shia Islam. Intending to become an ascetic, he gave up Banten to his son and travelled to Cirebon alone. Who was this Commander-in-Chief Fatahillah? *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* had no relevant records, and Sanusi Pane's *Sedjarah Indonesia* is also vague; it states only that Fatahillah conquered Banten and Cirebon in 1527, became an ascetic in 1552, and died c. 1570. As he was buried on Jati Mountain (in Javanese, *gunung jati*), near Cirebon, he became known as Sunan Gunung Jati (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 228–229). He is venerated today as a sage of Indonesian Islam.

Meanwhile, according to *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon*, Sultan Trenggana of Demak ordered his son Toh A Bo to occupy Majapahit in 1527. The *Annals*' author hypothesized that Toh A Bo was the Prince of Timur, the son of Sultan Trenggana, who disappears suddenly from history. *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* also records that Kin San, the Chinese-speaking Governor of Semarang, followed the Demak fleet westward to suppress the Muslim Chinese of Semarang and Cirebon. The fleet's commander was Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah, who met the Muslim leader Tan Eng-Huat (陳英發) in Cirebon and peacefully entered the city (Ricklefs, [1984](#), pp. 32–33). Fatahillah also conquered Banten, where he remained to ward off the Portuguese in Malacca.

I believe the Commander-in-Chief Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah (Fatahillah) was not Sultan Trenggana's brother-in-law, as written by Sanusi Pane in *Sedjarah Indonesia* (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 230), but rather Sultan Trenggana's second son. *Sedjarah Indonesia* records Sultan Trenggana as having two sons, Sunan Prawoto (discussed previously) and Pangeran [Prince] Timur (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 230). Why would Sultan Trenggana suddenly order his son to travel westward, to conquer the northern coast of Java? Because he recognized that the Governor of Jepara, the husband of his second daughter, was planning to conquer Banten for himself and therefore establish his own kingdom (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 230–231). Ultimately, however, it was Sultan Trenggana who consolidated power in West Java, which he incorporated into a vassal state under the command of his son (titled Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah; D. S. Chen, [2003](#), p. 149).



Regarding the founding of the Sultanate of Cirebon, Sanusi Pane (1950/1980)'s *Sedjarah Indonesia* is unclear. Although Chapter 21 of the book is titled "Banten and Cirebon", it deals solely with the former. Conversely, *The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon* are more descriptive of the founding of Cirebon by Commander-in-Chief Fatahillah. When he returned to Cirebon as an ascetic, he was persuaded by Hajji Tan Eng-Huat to establish an Islamic kingdom in Cirebon, lest they be forced to speak Chinese and abandon their faith (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 40). Fatahillah promised to establish a sultanate in Cirebon, with Tan Eng-Huat's daughter, Tan Hong-Tin-Niu (陳鳳三娘),<sup>16</sup> as his consort (p. 41). Tan Hong-Tin-Niu was escorted by Tan Eng-Huat's nephew, Tan Sam-Cai (陳三才), and he was subsequently installed as Minister of Finance (Cheng, 2019). Hajji Tan Eng-Huat, also known as Ifdil Hanafi, was made Governor of Wirasendjaja—a territory of Cirebon that reached into Southwest Java. Using Sundanese, Tan Eng-Huat made significant inroads in spreading Islam, as taught by the *Shafi'i* school. However, he died during a military expedition to conquer the Kingdom of Garut (Ricklefs, 1984, pp. 42–43). When Sultan Fatahillah died in 1570, his son was no older than eighteen, but succeeded him as the second sultan.

## 2. The Second Sultan of Cirebon: Pangeran Deputi Tjeribon (r. 1570–1625)

Owing to the second sultan's young age, regency was taken by the queen and Tan Sam-Cai. It is stated in the *Annals* that Minister of Finance had been branded an apostate for his frequent trips to Chinese temples, and in 1585 he was poisoned to death at home. Around this time, Pangeran Deputi Tjeribon would have been more than thirty.

Although Pangeran Deputi Tjeribon would have gained power after adulthood, there is little documentation of his rule, or even whether a third sultan rose to power (Ricklefs, 1984, p. 44). It is clear, however, that by 1625 Cirebon had lost its independence and was basically ruled by Mataram (see Map 2 in Pluvier, 1995).

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<sup>16</sup> She continues to be commemorated by the Chinese in Cirebon today (D. L. Chen, 2011)

## 6 The Kingdom of Banten (1526–1687)

### 1. The First Sultan of Banten: Toh A Bo [杜亞寶] (Sjarif Hidajat Fatahillah) (r. 1526–1552)

In 1526, Commander-in-Chief Fatahillah controlled the ports of Cirebon, Kalapa (Jakarta), Banten, and Sunda. He served as Sultan of Banten, but was loyal to Demak. Under Fatahillah's rule, Banten flourished as a trade port, as Malacca and Palembang had declined in importance owing to the ongoing war between Portugal, Johor, and Aceh in the Strait of Malacca. However, in 1546, after the fall of Demak, Fatahillah was very frustrated. He was too old to claim the throne of Demak. He thus decided to surrender Banten to his son, then travel to Cirebon and become an ascetic. As noted above, however, he ultimately established a new sultanate.

### 2. The Second Sultan of Banten: Hasanuddin (r. 1552-1570)

During the rule of Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin, Banten expanded its power and spread Islam through Lampung, in southern Sumatra. Sultan Hasanuddin married the Princess of Indrapura, an area in Bengkulu, whose father gave him the pepper-rich Selebar area, which was rich in pepper (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 239). In other words, Banten's sphere of influence had reached southwest Sumatra. Sultan Hasanuddin officially declared his independence from Demak, which at the time was controlled by Pajang, in 1568. Sultan Hasanuddin died two years later and was succeeded by his son Pangeran Yusup.

### 3. The Third Sultan of Banten: Sultan Maulana Yusuf (Pangeran Pasareyan) (r. 1570–1580)

Sultan Pangeran [Prince] Yusup dedicated himself to developing agricultural and irrigation systems. However, he also invaded and occupied Pakuan in 1579, with its king falling to his armies. As this was the last Hindu–Buddhist Kingdom in West Java, the region had fallen completely under Islamic influence. Sultan Pangeran Yusup died in 1580 (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 240).





#### 4. The Fourth Sultan of Banten: Maulana Muhammad (r. 1580–1596)

When Yusup was seriously ill, his brother Pangeran Zabala came to Banten. He brought with him an armed entourage to contest the throne. At the time, Prime Minister Mangupumei agreed to recognize him as Sultan of Banten, and other senior officials under the influence of the Prime Minister also agreed to this arrangement. The Islamic judges, however, supported Yusup's son Maulana Muhammad—at the time only nine years old—as his rightful heir. The bureaucrats changed their attitudes, and Pangeran Zabal's claim to the throne failed. After Maulana Muhammad was coronated, he took the title Kencenladu; Prime Minister Mangupumei served as ruling regent (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 241).

Sixteen years later, when Sultan Muhammad was 25 years old, he led a fleet of 200 ships in attack against the Mataram loyalists in Palembang, thereby controlling the southern reaches of the Straits of Malacca. Palembang was of paramount importance in South Sumatra, offering an important center for distributing local products. The attack was fierce, and Palembang was almost captured. However, Sultan Muhammad was shot and killed in battle. Banten's navy carried the sultan's body back home, while his five-month old son succeeded to the throne (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 241).

#### 5. The Fifth Sultan of Banten: Abu al-Mafakhir Mahmud Abdul Kadir (Pangeran Ratu) (r. 1596–1640)

At the time of Sultan Muhammad's death, his son was only five months old. He was installed as Sultan Abdul Kadir, with Prime Minister Jayangara as his regent. However, control was wielded by the young sultan's guardian, Yeibanlangon, who branded himself king. It is in this year (1596) that the Dutch first arrived in the Indonesian archipelago and anchored their ships in Banten. In 1619, they successfully occupied Jakarta and renamed it Batavia; it subsequently became the regional headquarters of the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, VOC). The arrival of the Dutch disrupted Banten's prosperity, as they blocked the port and prohibited Chinese ships from trading in Banten. The sultanate's power slowly waned (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 240–241).

Around this time, Tjakra Kusuma Nbdurrahman (the third Sultan of Mataram) sought to ally himself with the Dutch in an assault on Banten, and thereby become recognized as Java's sole ruler. However, the Dutch denied him. From 1619 to 1640, Sultan Agung of Mataram expanded his sphere of influence in East Java, and attacked Batavia in 1628. In 1629, VOC Governor Jan Pieterszoon Coen died, and Mataram asked Batavia to recognize it as the supreme

ruler of Java (including Batavia). However, Mataram lacked the military strength to invade Batavia. Sultan Agung thus moved to cooperate with the Portuguese, Makassar, and Johor, an alliance that collapsed when the Dutch captured Malacca in 1640. At the time, Palembang belonged to Mataram, and often sent envoys; Banten, meanwhile, controlled the pepper producing areas of Djambi and Lampung. In 1642, Palembang asked Mataram to send troops to fight off the Dutch, but the Mataram fleet was destroyed (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 267–271).

For unknown reasons, Sultan Abdul Kadir of Banten was succeeded by his son in 1641. At that time, he was only 44 years old. Records do not indicate whether he died of illness.

#### 6. The Sixth Sultan of Banten: Abumale Ama Lamadura (r. 1640–1651)

Sultan Abumale Ama Lamadura had no special political achievements (Pane, [1950/1980](#), p. 286). During his reign, Sultan Agung of Mataram unified almost all of Java, even as Banten remained independent. However, after the death of Sultan Agung in 1645, Mataram's glory dimmed significantly (pp. 271–272). Sultan Abumale Ama Lamadura died in 1651 and was succeeded by his son Aburfa Abudur.

#### 7. The Seventh Sultan of Banten: Ageng Tirtayasa/Abulfatah Agung (Pangeran Surya) (r. 1651–1692)

After Aburfa Abudur succeeded to the throne, he was named Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa. He was determined to restore the influence of Banten, and hoped to drive the Dutch out of Jakarta. While Mataram was fighting with the Dutch, Banten regained its prosperity and maintained trade with Persia, India, Arabia, Indochina, Manila, China and Japan (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 286–287). It often sent troops to destroy the sugar cane plantations in Batavia.

In 1671, Sultan Ageng installed his son Pangeran Radu, known as Sultan Abu Nasr Abdul Kahhar, as his assistant. However, Sultan Ageng did not give up all of his power. He ordered the construction of a canal connecting two rivers in inland Banten. He built new cities on both sides of the canal. In 1674, his son went to Mecca and Turkey, where he studied for over a year. Several years after his return to Banten, in 1682, he was officially installed as Sultan Haji. At the time, Sultan Ageng was still alive; Banten thus entered a period of dual rule (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 286–287).



## 8. The Eighth Sultan of Banten: Sultan Haji (r. 1682–1687)

During his reign, Sultan Haji dealt mainly with internal affairs, while Sultan Ageng focused on restoring Banten's power. At the time, three *pangeran* travelled from Cirebon to Banten, where they were detained as Cirebon was fully under Mataram's control. Sultan Ageng repatriated them to Cirebon and tasked them with attacking the VOC. When this failed, Cirebon was conquered by the VOC, which also sought to deal with Banten. This created conflict between Sultan Ageng and Sultan Haji; the former advocated for continuing the conflict with the VOC, while the latter urged peace (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 287–288).

Sultan Ageng called on Makassar and Lampung, creating an alliance dedicated to resisting the VOC. When a fire broke out in the capital of Banten, Sultan Ageng's army entered the city and surrounded Sultan Haji's palace. Sultan Haji asked the Dutch for assistance. Even after the VOC saved Sultan Haji, Sultan Ageng continued to resist, and the Dutch suffered many casualties as they awaited reinforcements from Batavia. The VOC forced Sultan Haji to expel all foreigners from Banten, including the British, Danish, French, and Portuguese, and to forbid them from living in Banten; the wealthy Chinese, meanwhile, were moved to Batavia. An angry Sultan Ageng surrounded Banten, but reinforcements from Batavia arrived shortly thereafter. After two days of fierce fighting, Sultan Ageng's forces retreated. Dutch Ambonese pursued, and in 1682 Sultan Ageng was finally forced to surrender. He was imprisoned in Banten, then moved to Batavia, where he died in 1692 (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 288–289).

In 1684, Sultan Haji signed an agreement with the VOC and abandoned all claims to Cirebon. The treaty stipulated that Banten was not allowed to trade in Maluku (Spice Islands), and that only the VOC had the right to buy pepper and import cloth in Banten and Sumatra. At the same time, the Dutch established bases in Cirebon and Banten; Banten had lost its independence. Sultan Haji died in 1687, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Pangeran Ratu, also known as Sultan Abu al-Fadhl Muhammad Yahya. Banten thus became a protectorate of the VOC, a state in which it remained until the mid-18th century (Pane, [1950/1980](#), pp. 290–292).

## 7 Conclusion

Generally, Indonesian records of the sultanates established on Java's north coast between the 15th and 17th centuries are sparse. They deal little with the founders' Chinese heritage. At the same time, although they discuss the sultanates of Demak and Banten in some detail, they ignore the sultanates of Pajang and Cirebon. Historical materials are insufficient, and Indonesian historians have been unwilling to discuss Chinese Muslims' involvement and contributions to the Islamization in Java. Importantly, although only the rulers and royal family of these sultanates were of Chinese heritage, the majority of the populace were indigenous Javanese; the few minorities (Muslims and non-Muslims of Chinese, South Asian, and Middle Eastern heritage) were generally religious leaders, technicians, or businessmen (i.e. social elites) and thus led social transformation.

This paper has explored the rise and fall of the Chinese Sultanates along Java's north coast. After the end of Zheng He's expeditions, Ming China broke its ties with the Chinese diaspora in the Indonesian archipelago. Members of this diaspora, who identified themselves predominantly as Javanese and Muslim even as they traced their lineage to a Majapahit king and a Chinese woman, established sultanates on Java's northern coast between the 15th and 17th centuries and spread Islam inland. Gradually, they transformed Javanese culture from a Hindu-Buddhist one to an Islamic one. The Muslim Chinese and the sultanates they established played an important role in the historical evolution and Islamization of Java.



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