



**Cultural Integration of Chinese Symbols in *Salaf Pesantren***

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**Abstract**

This study is motivated by the presence of Chinese-style architecture at *Pondok Pesantren Annasiba Salatiga*, which continues to preserve the traditional *salaf pesantren* educational system and Javanese *santri* culture. This phenomenon reflects a unique cultural encounter between Islam, Javanese tradition, and Chinese culture within the educational space of the *pesantren*. The study aims to analyze the symbolism of Chinese architecture, the construction of Javanese identity, and the practice of religious moderation within the *pesantren* environment. This research employs a descriptive, qualitative approach, drawing on the perspectives of cultural anthropology and architectural semiotics. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that Chinese architectural elements, including curved roofs, Chinese-style gates, ornaments, and symbolic colors, are reinterpreted within the Islamic and Javanese traditions of An-Nasiha Salaf Pesantren. Their integration with Javanese cultural values fosters cultural acculturation, multicultural awareness, tolerance, and religious moderation, contributing to the formation of an inclusive and adaptive Islamic identity. This study recommends further development of *pesantren* studies focusing on cultural perspectives and architectural symbolism as part of broader discussions on Islam Nusantara and multicultural Islamic education.

**Keywords:** Chinese Architecture; Islam Nusantara; Javanese Identity; Multicultural Islamic Education.

**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh keberadaan arsitektur bercorak Tiongkok di Pondok Pesantren Annasiba yang tetap mempertahankan sistem pendidikan pesantren salaf dan budaya santri Jawa. Fenomena tersebut menunjukkan adanya perjumpaan budaya yang menarik antara Islam, Jawa, dan Tiongkok dalam ruang pendidikan pesantren. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis simbolisme arsitektur Tiongkok, konstruksi identitas kejawaan, serta moderasi beragama dalam lingkungan pesantren. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan perspektif antropologi budaya dan semiotika arsitektur. Data diperoleh melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa unsur-unsur arsitektur Tionghoa, yang meliputi atap melengkung, gerbang bergaya Tionghoa, ornamen, dan warna-warna simbolik, direinterpretasikan dalam tradisi Islam dan budaya Jawa di Pondok Pesantren Salaf An-Nasiha. Integrasi unsur-unsur tersebut dengan nilai-nilai budaya Jawa mendorong terjadinya akulturasi budaya, kesadaran multikultural, toleransi, dan moderasi beragama, yang pada akhirnya berkontribusi pada pembentukan identitas Islam yang inklusif dan adaptif. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pengembangan kajian pesantren berbasis budaya dan simbol arsitektur sebagai bagian dari studi Islam Nusantara dan pendidikan Islam multikultural.

**Kata Kunci:** Arsitektur Tiongkok; Identitas Kejawaan; Islam Nusantara; Pendidikan Islam Multikultural.

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Indonesia have long functioned not only as centers for the transmission of Islamic knowledge but also as cultural spaces that shape the social identity of Muslim communities. In their historical development, *pesantren* have never existed within a culturally homogeneous environment. Instead, they continuously interact with local and global traditions, producing distinctive expressions of Indonesian Islam. One particularly intriguing phenomenon is the emergence of *salaf pesantren* featuring Chinese-style architecture. At the same time, their educational system, student culture, and religious leadership remain deeply rooted in Javanese and traditional Islamic (*salafiyah*) traditions.<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon reflects a unique cultural synthesis of Chinese architectural symbolism, Islamic educational traditions, and Javanese identity within a single religious educational space.<sup>2</sup>

The presence of Chinese architectural elements within *salaf pesantren* raises significant academic questions, particularly regarding symbolic meaning and the construction of cultural identity through architectural space. Traditionally, *salaf pesantren* have been associated with Javanese Islamic traditions, reflected in their educational practices, spatial arrangements, daily language, and the relational patterns between kiai and students.<sup>3</sup> However, the incorporation of Chinese-inspired ornaments, colors, roofs, gates, and decorative forms introduces a new cultural dimension into the identity of *pesantren*.<sup>4</sup> The central issue, therefore, concerns how these architectural symbols are interpreted by the *pesantren* community and to what extent they represent a process of cultural acculturation within traditional Islamic education.

The interaction between Javanese and Chinese cultural elements in Indonesian religious architecture is not entirely new. Previous studies have demonstrated the integration of Javanese, Islamic, and Chinese architectural forms in several mosques across Indonesia, including the Cheng Ho Mosques and the Grand Mosque of *Buntet Pesantren* in Cirebon.<sup>5</sup> Research conducted by Bagus Sekar Alam, for instance, reveals that the acculturation of Javanese and Chinese architectural traditions can be identified through roof structures, ornaments, colors, and building layouts that symbolize historical interactions between Javanese Muslims and Chinese communities.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, studies on the Cheng Ho Mosques in Java indicate that Chinese architectural elements function not merely as aesthetic features but also as symbols of cultural identity and social harmony within multicultural societies.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marzuki Marzuki, Miftahuddin Miftahuddin, and Mukhamad Murdiono, "Multicultural Education In Salaf Pesantren And Prevention Of Religious Radicalism In Indonesia," *Jurnal Cakrawala Pendidikan* 39, no. 1 (February 2020): 12–25, <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v39i1.22900>.

<sup>2</sup> Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "The Tao of Islam: Ceng Ho and the Legacy of Chinese Muslims in Pre-Modern Java," *Studia Islamika* 16, no. 1 (2009), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v16i1.489>.

<sup>3</sup> Munir and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "Characteristics of Preserving Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School Traditions: Lessons from Indonesia and Malaysia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 1 (August 2021): 67–88, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2021.101.67-88>.

<sup>4</sup> Choirul Mahfud, "The Role Of Cheng Ho Mosque: The New Silk Road, Indonesia-China Relations in Islamic Cultural Identity," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 8, no. 1 (June 2014): 23–38, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2014.8.1.23-38>.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad Nur Sheha Gunawan et al., "Akulturasi Arsitektur Bangunan Cina Pada Masjid Agung Sang Cipta Rasa Cirebon," *Besaung: Jurnal Seni Desain Dan Budaya* 8, no. 2 (September 2023): 162–67, <https://doi.org/10.36982/jsdb.v8i2.3289>.

<sup>6</sup> M. Bagus Sekar Alam, "Acculturation of Java and Chinese Culture in Historical Perspective," *Sinolingua: Journal of Chinese Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2023): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.20961/sinolingua.v1i1.68944>.

<sup>7</sup> Mahfud, "The Role Of Cheng Ho Mosque."

Nevertheless, most previous studies have primarily focused on mosques,<sup>8</sup> Chinatown areas,<sup>9</sup> or Chinese Muslim communities,<sup>10</sup> while relatively little attention has been paid to *salaf pesantren* as traditional Islamic educational institutions. Existing *pesantren* studies tend to emphasize curriculum, religious authority, Islamic scholarship, and religious moderation,<sup>11</sup> whereas architectural symbolism as a representation of cultural identity remains underexplored. In fact, *pesantren* architecture should not be understood merely as a physical structure, but also as a symbolic medium through which values, identities, and religious worldviews are constructed and reproduced.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, there remains a significant research gap regarding how Chinese architectural symbolism is interpreted within *Salaf pesantren* that are culturally dominated by Javanese traditions.

This research gap becomes increasingly important because architecture is never culturally neutral. Architectural forms embody systems of meaning, ideology, and social identity. Within Chinese cultural traditions, architectural elements such as red colors, symmetrical layouts, curved gates, dragon ornaments, and layered roofs contain philosophical meanings associated with harmony, prosperity, and cosmic balance.<sup>13</sup> When these symbols are incorporated into Javanese *salaf pesantren* environments, a process of identity negotiation emerges between local culture, Islamic values, and Chinese cultural heritage. This phenomenon demonstrates the adaptive capacity of *pesantren* in responding to cultural diversity without losing their Islamic identity and traditional foundations.

Without a deeper scholarly examination, *pesantren* may continue to be viewed reductively as monolithic religious institutions detached from broader cultural dynamics.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, neglecting the symbolic dimensions of architecture risks overlooking important values such as multiculturalism, cultural tolerance, and the dynamic negotiation of identity within *pesantren* traditions.<sup>15</sup> In the context of Indonesia's plural society, *pesantren* featuring Chinese architectural styles may serve as concrete representations of cultural harmony and religious moderation. Therefore, examining architectural symbolism is essential not only within cultural and architectural studies but also in the broader discourse of multicultural Islamic education.

This study is based on the assumption that *pesantren* architecture constitutes a cultural text that can be interpreted through symbolic and interpretive approaches. *Pesantren* buildings

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<sup>8</sup> Diah Ayuningrum, "Akulturasi Budaya Cina Dan Islam Dalam Arsitektur Tempat Ibadah Di Kota Lasem, Jawa Tengah," *Sabda: Jurnal Kajian Kebudayaan* 12, no. 2 (December 2019): 122–35, <https://doi.org/10.14710/sabda.12.2.122-135>; Arita Arita, Hartanto Budiwuono, and Yuswadi Saliya, "Acculturation of Local and Non-Local Architecture on the Scoping Elements of the Merah Panjunan Mosque Building in Cirebon," *ARTEKS: Jurnal Teknik Arsitektur* 6, no. 2 (August 2021): 295–304, <https://doi.org/10.30822/arteks.v6i2.755>.

<sup>9</sup> Husna Nashihin, Edi Purnama, and Triana Hermawati, "Religious Moderation Education in the Relationship between Islamic Boarding Schools and the Chinese Ethnicity in the Chinatown of Rembang City," *At Tuots: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, December 5, 2023, 966–75, <https://doi.org/10.51468/jpi.v5i2.379>.

<sup>10</sup> Choirul Mahfud, "Chinese Muslim Community Development in Contemporary Indonesia: Experiences of PITI in East Java," *Studia Islamika* 25, no. 3 (December 2018): 471–502, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v25i3.6755>.

<sup>11</sup> Marzuki, Miftahuddin, and Murdiono, "Multicultural Education In Salaf Pesantren."

<sup>12</sup> Nashihin, Purnama, and Hermawati, "Religious Moderation Education."

<sup>13</sup> Mukhoyyaroh Mukhoyyaroh, Didin Saepudin, and M. Ikhsan Tanggok, "Chinese Culture in the Cirebon Sultanate: Symbolic and Philosophical Meanings," *Insaniyat: Journal of Islam and Humanities*, November 30, 2021, 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.15408/insaniyat.v6i1.21500>.

<sup>14</sup> Siti Zulaika, M. Fadhil Uzmi, and M. Iqbal, "Tradisi Pesantren Sebagai Benteng Moral Dan Budaya Bangsa," *Jurnal Recoms* 2, no. 2 (December 2025): 166–78, <https://doi.org/10.59548/rc.v2i2.586>.

<sup>15</sup> Niswatin Faoziah, Hasan Mahfudh, and Rima Ronika, "Religion and Multiculturalism at Pesantren Sunan Pandanaran and Mu'allimin Yogyakarta," *Al-Albab* 5, no. 1 (August 2016): 3–29, <https://doi.org/10.24260/alalbab.v5i1.352>.

function not only as educational facilities but also as repositories of historical narratives, ideological meanings, and cultural identities.<sup>16</sup> In this context, Chinese architectural symbols are understood as cultural representations that undergo reinterpretation within Javanese *salaf pesantren* environments.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, this study investigates not only the physical aspects of architecture but also how these symbols are interpreted by kiai, students, and the broader *pesantren* community as part of a distinctive Islamic educational identity.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the symbolism of Chinese architecture in *Salaf Pesantren* from the perspectives of Islamic education and Javanese identity. The study is expected to make theoretical contributions to the development of culturally grounded Islamic education studies, particularly regarding the relationship between architectural space, cultural symbolism, and the construction of *pesantren* identity. Furthermore, this research seeks to enrich scholarly discussions on cultural acculturation within Indonesian Islam and to demonstrate that *pesantren* possess an inclusive character in accommodating cultural diversity while maintaining their *salafiyah* traditions and Javanese Islamic identity.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive field research approach to explore the symbolism of Chinese architecture at *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiha* and its relationship to Islamic identity and Javanese culture. A case study design was adopted because the *pesantren* represents a unique form of cultural acculturation in which Chinese architectural elements are integrated into a *salaf* Islamic educational environment.<sup>18</sup> The study involved nine participants, including one kiai (*pesantren* leader) as the key informant, two teachers (*ustadh/ustadhab*) actively involved in religious instruction, two *santri* who had resided in the *pesantren* for at least 1 year, and two community leaders living in the surrounding area. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their knowledge, involvement, and experiences related to the *pesantren's* educational, cultural, and architectural practices.

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and a review of relevant literature. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide focusing on architectural symbolism, Islamic educational traditions, Javanese cultural values, and perceptions of cultural diversity within the *pesantren*. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for analysis. Documentation included photographs of architectural features, institutional records, and historical materials related to the development of the *pesantren*.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.<sup>19</sup> In addition, architectural semiotics was employed to interpret the denotative, connotative, and symbolic meanings of architectural elements, including curved roofs, Chinese-style gates, ornaments,

<sup>16</sup> Nensi Golda Yuli, Ilya Fadjar Maharika, and Frank Eckardt, "The Architecture of Pesantren: Current Issues, Challenges and Prospect for Design Framework," *Journal of Islamic Architecture* 7, no. 4 (December 2023): 626–38, <https://doi.org/10.18860/jia.v7i4.21006>.

<sup>17</sup> Mukhoyyaroh, Saepudin, and Tanggok, "Chinese Culture in the Cirebon Sultanate."

<sup>18</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (SAGE Publications, 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Matthew B. Miles and Michael Huberman, *An Expanded Sourcebook Qualitative Data Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

colors, and spatial arrangements.<sup>20</sup> To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, source, method, and time triangulation were applied by comparing information obtained from different participants, data collection techniques, and observation periods. Member checking was also conducted to confirm the accuracy and consistency of the interpretations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Symbolism of Chinese Architecture at *Annasiha Pesantren*

*Pesantren* architecture at *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* extends beyond its function as a physical setting for Islamic education; it simultaneously embodies cultural identity, religious values, and the worldview of the community that inhabits it. The architectural design of the *pesantren* reflects a distinctive synthesis of Chinese cultural elements, *salaf* Islamic tradition, and Javanese identity, embedded in the everyday life of the *santri*.<sup>21</sup> Rather than functioning solely as a functional space, the *pesantren* emerges as a cultural arena where acculturation occurs, and socio-religious identity is continuously negotiated.

This cultural hybridity is clearly evident in architectural components such as building forms, ornamental details, color schemes, gate structures, and spatial organization. Curved roof designs, Chinese-style gates, and geometric ornaments, along with the dominant use of red and gold, visually evoke a strong Chinese architectural atmosphere. In Chinese cultural symbolism, red symbolizes prosperity, harmony, and vitality, while gold signifies dignity and well-being.<sup>22</sup> These visual elements distinguish *An-Nasiba* from many *salaf pesantren* that are typically characterized by Javanese vernacular simplicity or rural Islamic boarding school aesthetics.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, incorporating these cultural markers does not dilute the *pesantren's* Islamic identity. Instead, they are reinterpreted and harmonized through the values of *salaf* tradition and Javanese cultural sensibilities, allowing different cultural layers to coexist meaningfully within the same space. Interviews with the *kiai*, teachers, *santri*, and surrounding community indicate that these architectural choices are not merely aesthetic expressions, but also reflect the *pesantren's* openness to cultural diversity while maintaining its core religious and educational mission.<sup>24</sup> Community members view these features as distinctive markers of identity, while *santri* interpret them as expressions of cultural richness rather than contradictions to Islamic teachings.

Overall, the findings show that the architecture of *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* functions as a living representation of cultural negotiation, in which Chinese aesthetic influences, Javanese identity, and *salaf* Islamic values intersect and are continuously rearticulated within the *pesantren's* educational and social life. This configuration also reflects a process of modernization that does not result in the loss of identity. Instead, it demonstrates how tradition can be adaptively reconfigured within contemporary contexts, as can also be observed in *Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor*, where institutional modernization and spatial organization develop without

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 109–117.

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Aji Nugroho, “Observation of the An-Nasiba Islamic Boarding School,” March 30, 2026.

<sup>22</sup> Mengchen Xu, “Analysis of the Cultural Significance and Social Rationale of ‘Red’ in Chinese Culture,” *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media* 42 (March 2024): 69–75, <https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/42/20240827>.

<sup>23</sup> AUFARUL MAULIDY TAUFIKILLAH and ARIGAN WICAKSA, “Konsepsi Dan Karakteristik Arsitektur Islam Pada Bangunan Pesantren Indonesia,” *Abstrak: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Seni, Media Dan Desain* 1, no. 6 (November 2024): 191–200, <https://doi.org/10.62383/abstrak.v1i6.414>.

<sup>24</sup> “Interview with the *Kiai*, Teachers, *Santri*, and Surrounding Community of Annasiha Pesantren,” interview by Muhammad Aji Nugroho, May 23, 2026.

weakening the core religious and moral foundations.<sup>25</sup> From the perspective of visual pedagogy, the architectural space itself becomes an educational medium, where forms, colors, ornaments, and spatial arrangements function as visual texts that subtly transmit values, shape perception, and construct meaning for *santri* through their everyday lived experiences within the *pesantren* environment.<sup>26</sup> The explanation above can be found in the following image;



Figure 1. The Chinese-Style Gate of An-Nasiha *Pesantren*

Beyond its visual appearance, the spatial organization of the *pesantren* also reflects the integration of educational, religious, and cultural functions. The mosque, study halls, student dormitories, and open communal spaces are arranged to support *salafiyah* education, which emphasizes simplicity, close relationships between the *kiai* and *santri*, and collective living grounded in traditional Islamic values.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, Chinese architecture within the *pesantren* does not function as a dominant foreign cultural symbol, but rather as an aesthetic element integrated into the *pesantren's* social and educational system.<sup>28</sup> The physical environment of the *pesantren* continues to embody the characteristic traditions of *salaf* education, including *bandongan*, *sorogan*, the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), and intensive daily religious practices.<sup>29</sup> The findings described above were identified in the field and documented as follows:

<sup>25</sup> Dwi Istiyani et al., “Modernising without Westernising: The Educational Transformation of Pesantren Traditional into KMI Mu’adalah,” *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 34, no. 2 (April 2026), <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.34.2.18>.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Aji Nugroho, Wahyu Setyaningsih, and Muhamad Khusnul Muna, “Visual Pedagogy of Religious Moderation: An Iconographic Analysis of Borobudur Reliefs,” *Addin* 20, no. 1 (June 2026): 289–320, <https://doi.org/10.21043/addin.v20i1.36874>.

<sup>27</sup> “Interview with the Board of Asatidz and Santri of An-Nasiha Islamic Boarding School,” interview by Muhammad Aji Nugroho, May 23, 2026.

<sup>28</sup> “Interview with the Leader of Annasiha Islamic Boarding School,” interview by Muhammad Aji Nugroho, May 23, 2026.

<sup>29</sup> “Interview with the Board of Asatidz and Santri of An-Nasiha Islamic Boarding School.”



**Figure 2.** The Chinese-Style Mosque and Hall of An-Nasiha *Pesantren*

From the perspective of architectural semiotics, the buildings of *Pondok Pesantren Annasiba* can be interpreted through denotative, connotative, and symbolic meanings embedded in their architectural elements. At the denotative level, features such as curved roofs, Chinese-style gates, red and gold colors, and ornamental details function as the visible characteristics that distinguish the *pesantren* from most traditional *salaf pesantren* in Java.<sup>30</sup> Beyond their physical appearance, however, these elements also carry cultural meanings that reflect harmony, openness, and the interaction between Islamic, Javanese, and Chinese traditions within the *pesantren* environment.

At the symbolic level, the architecture of the *pesantren* represents the inclusive and adaptive character of Islam Nusantara. The integration of Chinese architectural symbols into a *salafiyah* Islamic educational setting demonstrates that Islam can engage harmoniously with cultural diversity without losing its religious identity.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, the *pesantren's* architecture functions not only as a physical structure, but also as a cultural symbol that shapes multicultural awareness, social harmony, and religious moderation among the *santri* and the surrounding community. The architecture of *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* reflects a harmonious integration of Islamic, Javanese, and Chinese cultural elements through meaningful architectural symbols. These symbols represent the inclusive and adaptive character of Islam Nusantara in fostering multicultural awareness and religious moderation within the *pesantren* environment.

### **Islamic Education and Javanese Identity at *An-Nasiba Pesantren***

Islamic education at *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* functions not only as a medium for transmitting Islamic knowledge but also as a space for shaping the cultural identity of the *santri* rooted in Javanese traditions.<sup>32</sup> As a *salaf pesantren*, its educational system continues to preserve classical learning traditions such as *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and the study of classical Islamic texts

<sup>30</sup> Barthes, *Mythologies*, 109–117.

<sup>31</sup> Ayuningrum, “Akulturasi Budaya Cina Dan Islam.”

<sup>32</sup> “Interview with the Santri of Annasiba Islamic Boarding School,” interview by Muhammad Aji Nugroho, May 23, 2026.

(*kitab kuning*), as well as the paternalistic relationship between the kiai and the *santri*.<sup>33</sup> These traditions reflect the characteristics of Javanese Islamic education, which emphasizes adab (ethical conduct), respect for teachers, simplicity, and collective life within the *pesantren* environment.<sup>34</sup> In this context, Javanese identity is reflected not only in language, social traditions, and the daily interactions of the *santri*, but also in the cultural values embedded within the traditional Islamic educational system itself.

Javanese identity within the *pesantren* can be seen through the culture of *unggah-ungguh* (Javanese etiquette), respect toward the kiai, deliberative traditions, and patterns of life that emphasize social harmony and simplicity.<sup>35</sup> These values are closely connected to the philosophy of Javanese culture, which upholds balance, inner peace, and social ethics in communal life. Within the educational practices of the *pesantren*, these Javanese values function as a medium for character formation, encouraging *santri* to develop humility (*tawadhu'*), discipline, tolerance, and respect for others.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, Islamic education in the *pesantren* is not solely oriented toward the mastery of religious knowledge, but also toward shaping the social and cultural identity of the *santri* through the internalization of local values deeply rooted in Javanese society.

The presence of Chinese-style architecture within the *pesantren* environment does not diminish the Javanese identity that has long been the defining character of *salaf pesantren*. On the contrary, it demonstrates that Javanese identity within the *pesantren* remains open and adaptive toward cultural diversity.<sup>37</sup> Javanese culture serves as a social foundation that enables harmonious cultural acculturation without generating identity conflicts.<sup>38</sup> In this context, the *pesantren* demonstrates its ability to integrate external cultural elements into local Islamic traditions, resulting in an inclusive, multicultural form of Islamic education. Therefore, Javanese identity within the *pesantren* is not understood as an exclusive identity, but rather as a cultural identity capable of engaging in dialogue with other cultures within the framework of Islamic values.<sup>39</sup> The following table presents the main dimensions of Islamic education and Javanese identity constructed within the multicultural environment of *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiha*.

**Table 1.** Educational and Cultural Identity at An-Nasiha *Pesantren*

No.	Main Aspect	Description	Educational Meaning
1	Islamic Educational Orientation	Islamic education at the <i>pesantren</i> functions not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to shape the social and cultural identity of the <i>santri</i> .	Integrates religious learning with cultural awareness and identity formation.
2	Javanese-Based Character Education	The <i>pesantren</i> emphasizes values such as <i>adab</i> , humility ( <i>tawadhu'</i> ), simplicity, discipline, and social ethics rooted in Javanese traditions.	Forms the moral and cultural character of the <i>santri</i> within the <i>pesantren</i> environment.

<sup>33</sup> Sari Hernawati, Khoirun Nofik, and Muhammad Hafizh, "The Paradigm of Salaf Pesantren: The Concept of Charismatic Spiritual Leadership of Kyai at Assalafiyah Pesantren," *Edukasia Islamika* 9, no. 1 (June 2024): 97–111, <https://doi.org/10.28918/jei.v9i1.7276>.

<sup>34</sup> "Interview with the Board of Asatidz and Santri of An-Nasiha Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>35</sup> Muhammad Latif Fauzi, "Traditional Islam In Javanese Society: The Roles of Kyai and Pesantren in Preserving Islamic Tradition and Negotiating Modernity," *JOURNAL OF INDONESIAN ISLAM* 6, no. 1 (June 2012): 125–44, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2012.6.1.125-144>.

<sup>36</sup> "Interview with the Santri of Annasiha Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>37</sup> Fauzi, "Traditional Islam In Javanese Society."

<sup>38</sup> Rofiq Hamzah, "Arus Balik Pesantren: Reharmoni Pesantren Dan Kebudayaan Jawa," *Tashwirul Afkar* 40, no. 2 (December 2021), <https://doi.org/10.51716/ta.v40i2.39>.

<sup>39</sup> Fauzi, "Traditional Islam In Javanese Society."

No.	Main Aspect	Description	Educational Meaning
3	Cultural Adaptability	The <i>pesantren</i> demonstrates an open and adaptive attitude toward cultural diversity without losing its Islamic identity.	Encourages inclusive, moderate perspectives on cultural differences.
4	Multicultural Islamic Education	The integration of local traditions and external cultural influences creates a multicultural educational environment.	Promotes tolerance, coexistence, and intercultural understanding among the <i>santri</i> .
5	Representation of Islam Nusantara	The <i>pesantren</i> reflects an Islamic educational model that harmonizes religious values, local culture, and openness toward diversity.	Represents inclusive, moderate, and culturally adaptive Islamic education in Indonesia.

Table 1 demonstrates that Islamic education at *Pondok Pesantren Annasiba* is closely connected to the formation of social, cultural, and religious identity within the *pesantren* environment. The educational system does not merely focus on the transmission of Islamic knowledge, but also emphasizes character formation through values rooted in Javanese culture, such as humility, discipline, simplicity, social ethics, and harmonious living. At the same time, the *pesantren* maintains an open and adaptive attitude toward cultural diversity, enabling the integration of local traditions and external cultural influences within a multicultural educational setting. This condition reflects the inclusive and moderate character of the *pesantren*, where Islamic values, local wisdom, and openness toward diversity coexist harmoniously. Consequently, the *pesantren's* educational model can be understood as a representation of Islam Nusantara, promoting culturally rooted, adaptive, and multicultural Islamic education in Indonesian society.

From the perspective of Islamic education, Javanese identity plays a significant role in shaping the moderate character and tolerant attitudes of the *santri*. Values such as *tepa selira* (empathy and social sensitivity), mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), respect for differences, and harmonious living become integral parts of character education within the *pesantren*. These values demonstrate that Islamic education in Javanese *pesantren* does not merely emphasize theological dimensions but also incorporates cultural and social dimensions relevant to Indonesia's multicultural society. Thus, the integration of *salafiyah* Islamic education and Javanese identity positions the *pesantren* as a representation of Islam Nusantara, an Islamic educational tradition capable of integrating religious values, local culture, and openness toward cultural diversity within a harmonious educational environment.

### ***Annasiba Pesantren as a Space for Multicultural Dialogue***

*Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* can be understood as a multicultural space because it brings together diverse cultural elements within a traditional Islamic educational environment.<sup>40</sup> The presence of Chinese-style architecture within a Javanese *salaf pesantren* tradition demonstrates that the *pesantren* does not exist within a closed cultural framework, but rather remains open to processes of cultural dialogue and acculturation.<sup>41</sup> The combination of Chinese architectural symbolism, *salafiyah* Islamic education, and Javanese *santri* culture forms a distinctive *pesantren* identity while simultaneously representing cultural harmony within *pesantren* life.<sup>42</sup> This condition

<sup>40</sup> "Interview with a Religious Leader from Nahdlatul Ulama," interview by Muhammad Aji Nugroho, May 23, 2026.

<sup>41</sup> Nashihin, Purnama, and Hermawati, "Religious Moderation Education."

<sup>42</sup> "Interview with the Leader of Annasiba Islamic Boarding School."

illustrates that the *pesantren* is not merely a religious educational institution, but also a social space where values, symbols, and cultural identities interact side by side without diminishing the *pesantren's* fundamental Islamic character.

As a multicultural space, the *pesantren* demonstrates an adaptive attitude toward cultural diversity by incorporating Chinese cultural elements into its visual and symbolic identity. Chinese-style ornaments, colors, gates, and architectural forms are not presented as foreign cultural symbols detached from *pesantren* traditions; instead, they are harmoniously integrated into the *pesantren's* religious and educational life.<sup>43</sup> In this context, Javanese culture serves as a social foundation that strengthens cultural integration through values such as harmony, *tepa selira* (social sensitivity and empathy), cooperation (*gotong royong*), and respect for differences. Therefore, multiculturalism within the *pesantren* is reflected not only in the physical structure of the buildings, but also in social relationships, *santri* culture, and everyday practices that emphasize tolerance and communal solidarity.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 2.** Core Elements of Multicultural Islamic Education at An-Nasiha *Pesantren*

No.	Multicultural Elements	Forms/Representations at An-Nasiha Pesantren	Multicultural Meanings
1.	Chinese Architecture	Curved roofs, Chinese-style gates, geometric ornaments	Representation of cultural openness and acculturation within the <i>pesantren</i>
2.	Javanese Culture	<i>Unggah-ungguh</i> (Javanese etiquette), Javanese language, respect toward the <i>kiai</i>	Strengthening local identity and social harmony
3.	<i>Salaf</i> Islamic Tradition	<i>Bandongan</i> , <i>sorogan</i> , and the study of classical Islamic texts ( <i>kitab kuning</i> )	Preservation of classical Islamic educational traditions
4.	Symbolic Colors	Dominant use of red and gold in the buildings	Symbols of harmony, dignity, and prosperity in Chinese culture
5.	Collective <i>Santri</i> Life	Cooperation and communal living in dormitories	Development of social solidarity and tolerance
6.	<i>Kiai-Santri</i> Relationship	Paternalistic relationship and respect for teachers	Integration of religious and local cultural values
7.	<i>Pesantren</i> Spatial Arrangement	Mosque, study halls, dormitories, and communal spaces	Spaces for social interaction and multicultural education
8.	Religious Moderation Values	Tolerant and open attitudes toward external cultures	Representation of moderate and inclusive Islam
9.	Cultural Acculturation	The integration of Islamic, Javanese, and Chinese cultures	A dynamic and adaptive <i>pesantren</i> identity
10.	Character Education	The cultivation of humility ( <i>tawadhu</i> ), discipline, and <i>tepa selira</i>	Formation of humanistic and multicultural <i>santri</i> character
11.	Architectural Symbolism	Ornaments and building forms as cultural signs	A symbolic communication medium for diversity
12.	Islam Nusantara	Integration of local culture within Islamic education	Representation of Islam that is accommodating toward culture

Table 2 demonstrates that *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiha* embodies a range of multicultural elements that are deeply integrated into its architectural, educational, social, and cultural dimensions. Its multicultural character is reflected in the use of Chinese-style architecture, including curved roofs, traditional Chinese gates, geometric ornaments, and the dominant use of red and gold colors, all of which

<sup>43</sup> Yuli, Maharika, and Eckardt, "The Architecture of Pesantren."

<sup>44</sup> "Interview with a Community Leader," interview by Muhammad Aji Nugroho, May 23, 2026.

symbolize cultural openness and the process of acculturation among Islamic, Javanese, and Chinese traditions.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, Javanese culture remains the primary social foundation of the *pesantren* through values such as *unggah-unggub* (Javanese etiquette), *tepa selira* (social sensitivity and empathy), cooperation (*gotong royong*), respect for the *keiai*, and the collective life of the *santri*, which together shape moderate and tolerant character formation.<sup>46</sup> Traditional *salaf* Islamic educational practices, including *bandongan*, *sorogan*, and the study of *kitab kuning*, continue to serve as the core of the *pesantren's* educational system while harmoniously engaging with the cultural diversity present within the *pesantren* environment.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the spatial organization of the *pesantren*, social interactions among the *santri*, architectural symbolism, and character education collectively indicate that the *pesantren* functions not only as a religious educational institution but also as a multicultural space representing the inclusive, accommodative, and culturally adaptive values of Islam *Nusantara* within Indonesia's plural society.<sup>48</sup>

The multicultural character of the *pesantren* is also evident in its educational process, which instills openness and respect for cultural diversity. Although the *Salafiyah* educational tradition continues to preserve classical Islamic values such as *adab* (ethical conduct), humility (*tawadhu'*), and respect for teachers, its social practices remain capable of engaging with the realities of a pluralistic society. The presence of Chinese cultural symbols within the *pesantren* environment serves as a form of cultural education, indirectly teaching *santri* that Islam can coexist harmoniously with diverse cultural traditions without losing its essential religious principles.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, the *pesantren* becomes a social learning space that cultivates multicultural awareness and moderate religious attitudes.

From a socio-religious perspective, the *pesantren*, as a multicultural space, represents Islam *Nusantara's* inclusive and adaptive character toward both local and global cultures.<sup>50</sup> The *pesantren* demonstrates that Islamic identity is not constructed through the rejection of other cultures, but through processes of selection, adaptation, and cultural reinterpretation in accordance with Islamic values.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the presence of Chinese architecture within the *pesantren* serves not only an aesthetic function, but also symbolizes cultural harmony and religious moderation within Indonesia's plural society. This condition highlights the strategic role of the *pesantren* in fostering a tolerant, peaceful, and culturally open social life through culture-based Islamic education.

<sup>45</sup> Vera Jenny Basiroen and Ida Bagus Kerthyayana Manuaba, "The Culture Aspect of Javanese and Chinese Acculturation In Lasem," *Humaniora: Journal of Indonesia Culture and Society* 13, no. 2 (May 2022): 91–97, <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v13i2.7527>.

<sup>46</sup> "Interview with the Leader of Annasiha Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>47</sup> "Interview with the Santri of Annasiha Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>48</sup> Yuli, Maharika, and Eckardt, "The Architecture of Pesantren."

<sup>49</sup> Faoziah, Mahfudh, and Ronika, "Religion and Multiculturalism."

<sup>50</sup> Lutfi Hakim, "Pesantren Dan Pluralisme: Analisis Peran Pesantren Sebagai Katalis Pribumisasi Islam Di Indonesia," *JOIES (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)* 6, no. 1 (June 2021): 49–69, <https://doi.org/10.15642/joies.2021.6.1.49-69>.

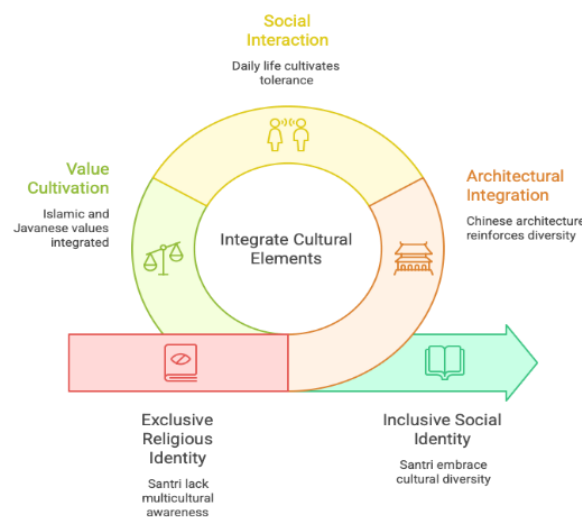
<sup>51</sup> David Eko Setiawan and Kalis Stevanus, "Significance of Islam Nusantara Values in an Indonesian Multicultural Society," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 1 (June 2023): 203–14, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol18no1.17>; Muhammad Aji Nugroho, "Pendidikan Islam Berwawasan Multikultural; Sebuah Upaya Membangun Pemahaman Keberagaman Inklusif Pada Umat Muslim," *MUDARRISA: Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (September 2016): 31–60, <https://doi.org/10.18326/mdr.v8i1.31-60>; Muhammad Aji Nugroho, "Inclusive-Multicultural Islamic Education for Former Terrorist Convicts," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education Studies (IJIES)* 6, no. 2 (December 2023): 123–47, <https://doi.org/10.33367/ijies.v6i2.4269>.

### The Relationship between Physical Space and the Cultural Consciousness of *Santri*

The cultural environment of *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* functions as a social space that shapes the worldview and cultural awareness of the *santri* in their daily lives. The presence of Chinese-style architecture within the tradition of a Javanese *salaf pesantren* is not perceived by the *santri* merely as an aesthetic feature of the buildings, but as an integral part of the *pesantren's* identity and distinctive character. The *santri* interpret these cultural symbols as representations of the *pesantren's* openness toward cultural diversity while still maintaining Islamic values and *salafiyah* traditions.<sup>52</sup> In this context, the *pesantren* environment serves as a social and cultural medium that indirectly teaches values of tolerance, harmony, and respect for cultural differences.

This understanding develops through the *santri's* social experiences within the *pesantren's* collective life. Daily interactions with the *pesantren's* physical environment, religious learning traditions, relationships with the *kiai*, and various cultural activities cultivate an awareness that Islam can coexist harmoniously with diverse cultural elements.<sup>53</sup> The presence of Chinese cultural symbols within the *pesantren* is not viewed as contradictory to the *santri's* Islamic identity, but rather as part of a cultural richness that can be integrated into religious life. Consequently, the *pesantren* environment serves as a space of social learning that shapes how *santri* understand the relationship among religion, culture, and a multicultural society.<sup>54</sup>

The social identity of the *santri* is shaped by the integration of Islamic values and Javanese cultural traditions within the *salaf pesantren* system. Islamic education in the *pesantren* emphasizes not only the mastery of religious knowledge through the study of *kitab kuning*, *bandongan*, and *sorogan*, but also the cultivation of *adab* (ethical conduct), simplicity, respect for teachers, and collective living, all of which characterize Javanese *pesantren* culture.<sup>55</sup> In everyday practice, Javanese values are reflected through *unggah-ungguh* (Javanese etiquette), the use of the Javanese language, humility (*tawadhu'*), and the prioritization of social harmony.<sup>56</sup> These values become part of the process of identity internalization that shapes the *santri* as both religious and culturally grounded individuals.<sup>57</sup>



**Figure 3.** The Process of Building Inclusive Social Identity in *Pesantren*

<sup>52</sup> "Interview with the Santri of Annasiha Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>53</sup> Hamzah, "Arus Balik Pesantren."

<sup>54</sup> Mahfud, "Chinese Muslim Community Development."

<sup>55</sup> "Interview with the Board of Asatidz and Santri of An-Nasiba Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>56</sup> "Interview with the Leader of Annasiha Islamic Boarding School."

<sup>57</sup> Hamzah, "Arus Balik Pesantren."

Figure 3 illustrates how *Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* fosters a multicultural identity by integrating Islamic, Javanese, and Chinese cultural elements within its environment. The diagram highlights three interconnected dimensions: social interaction, value cultivation, and architectural integration. Daily interactions among the *santri* cultivate tolerance and mutual understanding, while the integration of Islamic and Javanese values strengthens ethical character, social harmony, and cultural awareness. At the same time, the presence of Chinese-style architecture symbolizes openness toward cultural diversity and reinforces the *pesantren's* inclusive identity. The transformation shown in the lower section of the figure demonstrates a shift from an exclusive religious identity to a more inclusive social identity, in which *santri* develop multicultural awareness and embrace cultural differences as part of Islamic educational life. Overall, the figure reflects Islam *Nusantara's* adaptive and inclusive character in promoting religious moderation, cultural harmony, and coexistence within a multicultural society.

The presence of Chinese cultural elements within the *pesantren* environment further strengthens the *santri's* awareness that Islam is inclusive and adaptable to local cultures. The *santri* do not lose either their Javanese or Islamic identity despite living within a cultural space that combines diverse cultural symbols. Instead, this condition fosters a more open and moderate social identity in responding to diversity. Thus, *santri* identity within the *pesantren* is not constructed exclusively, but rather through an ongoing dialogue among religious values, local culture, and the multicultural realities within the *pesantren* environment.

The physical space of the *pesantren* also plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural consciousness and social identity of the *santri*.<sup>58</sup> Buildings, spatial arrangements, ornaments, and architectural symbols function not only as the backdrop of *pesantren* life but also as symbolic media that shape how *santri* understand cultural values and religiosity.<sup>59</sup> From the perspective of cultural semiotics, the physical environment of the *pesantren* can be understood as a social text that produces meaning and shapes the collective consciousness of the *santri*.<sup>60</sup> The presence of Chinese-style gates, the dominant use of red and gold colors, and architectural forms distinct from most *pesantren* create visual and social experiences that reinforce awareness of cultural diversity within the setting of Islamic education.

The relationship between physical space and cultural awareness is reflected in how *santri* perceive the *pesantren* as a space for cultural harmonization. The architectural environment indirectly shapes the *santri's* mindset, leading them to see cultural differences not as threats to religion but as social realities to be accepted and appreciated. Therefore, the physical space of the *pesantren* serves an educational function in fostering moderate, tolerant, and inclusive character among the *santri*. This condition demonstrates that *pesantren* architecture is not merely a form of cultural aesthetics, but also a social instrument in constructing Islamic identity, Javanese identity, and multicultural awareness within *pesantren* life.

<sup>58</sup> Firmansyah, Irja Putra Pratama, and Munir, "Symbolic Meanings in the Social Interaction of Santri in the Pesantren Environment," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 3 (October 2024): 1086–102, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v8i3.698>.

<sup>59</sup> Mubarak Mubarak et al., "Pesantren Strategies in Maintaining Islamic Education Traditions and Shaping Santri Social Identity in the Midst of Social Change," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (February 2026): 565–79, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v7i2.2632>.

<sup>60</sup> Herdis Herdiansyah, Hadid Sukmana, and Ratih Lestarini, "Eco-Pesantren as A Basic Forming of Environmental Moral and Theology," *Kalam* 12, no. 2 (2018): 303–26, <https://doi.org/10.24042/klm.v12i2.2834>.

## CONCLUSION

*Pondok Pesantren An-Nasiba* reflects a unique integration of Islamic, Javanese, and Chinese cultural elements within a traditional *salaf pesantren* environment. The presence of Chinese-style architecture represents cultural openness and harmonious acculturation without diminishing the *pesantren's* Islamic identity and Javanese traditions. Through religious learning traditions, social values, and symbolic architectural elements, the *pesantren* functions not only as an Islamic educational institution but also as a multicultural space that promotes tolerance, social harmony, and religious moderation. These findings position the *pesantren* as a representation of Islam *Nusantara*, characterized by inclusiveness, cultural adaptability, and openness toward diversity within Indonesia's plural society.

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