



## Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Madura Scientific Network: Historical Analysis of Sanad, Teachers, and Students in the Transmission of Islamic Science in the Archipelago

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### Abstract

This study comprehensively analyzes the scholarly network (jaringan keilmuan) of Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil bin Abdul Lathif al-Bangkalani (1835–1925), the greatest Islamic scholar of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago (Nusantara), based in Bangkalan, Madura. Employing intellectual history and descriptive social network analysis, the research traces four main dimensions: (1) his intellectual genealogy through his teachers in Madura, Java, and Haramayn; (2) the model of knowledge transmission at his Bangkalan pesantren including disciplines taught and pedagogical methods; (3) the dispersal of his students who subsequently established major pesantren and Islamic organizations across the Archipelago; and (4) the impact of this scholarly network on the character of Nusantara Islam—moderate, tolerant, and tradition-based (ahlussunnah wal jamaah). Using qualitative-historical library research on manuscripts, colonial archives, and academic literature, the study finds that Syaikhona Kholil constituted the central hub of the Islamic scholarly network in 19th–early 20th century Nusantara, with over 500,000 students who studied under him. The chains of transmission (sanad) of most Indonesian ulama of the era trace back to him, making him the 'common link' in Nusantara Islamic knowledge transmission. This study affirms that his scholarly network was not merely a regional Madura-Java phenomenon, but a trans-archipelago Islamic knowledge system connected to the Haramayn scholarly network.

Keywords: *Syaikhona Kholil; scholarly network; Scholar Sanad; knowledge transmission.*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis secara komprehensif jaringan keilmuan Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil bin Abdul Lathif al-Bangkalani (1835–1925), ulama terbesar Nusantara yang berkedudukan di Bangkalan, Madura. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan sejarah intelektual (intellectual history) dan analisis jaringan sosial deskriptif (social network analysis), penelitian ini menelusuri empat dimensi utama jaringan keilmuan: (1) genealogi intelektual Syaikhona Kholil melalui silsilah guru-gurunya di Madura, Jawa, dan Haramayn; (2) model transmisi keilmuan di pesantren Bangkalan beserta disiplin ilmu yang diajarkan dan metode pedagoginya; (3) persebaran murid-muridnya yang kemudian mendirikan pesantren-pesantren besar dan organisasi Islam di Nusantara; serta (4) pengaruh jaringan keilmuan ini terhadap corak Islam Nusantara yang moderat, toleran, dan berbasis tradisi (ahlussunnah wal jamaah). Penelitian bersifat kualitatif-historis dengan studi pustaka terhadap manuskrip, arsip kolonial, dan literatur ilmiah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Syaikhona Kholil merupakan simpul sentral (central hub) jaringan keilmuan Islam di Nusantara abad ke-19 dan awal abad ke-20, dengan lebih dari 500.000 santri yang pernah berguru kepadanya. Sanad keilmuan mayoritas ulama Indonesia pada era tersebut bermuara kepadanya, menjadikannya sebagai 'common link' dalam transmisi ilmu Islam Nusantara. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa jaringan keilmuan

Syaikhona Kholil bukan sekadar fenomena regional Madura-Jawa, melainkan sebuah sistem keilmuan Islam yang bersifat transnusantaric dengan koneksi ke jaringan ulama Haramayn. Kata Kunci: Syaikhona Kholil; jaringan keilmuan; sanad ulama; transmisi keilmuan.

### Research Background

In the intellectual history of Islam, the concepts of *rihlah 'ilmiyyah* (journey in search of knowledge) and *isnad* (chain of transmission of knowledge) play a central role in maintaining the authenticity and continuity of scientific traditions (Berkey, 1992). In the Islamic world of the archipelago, this transmission structure forms a very complex and interconnected network of ulama between regions, from Haramayn in Arabia to Islamic boarding schools in remote parts of Java and Madura. The study of this network was first systematically mapped by Azyumardi Azra (1994; 2004), who showed that the scholars of the archipelago in the 17th to 19th centuries were closely connected to the network of Middle Eastern scholars through the mechanism of diplomas and sanad.

In the large map of the archipelago's network of scholars, one of the most important and influential nodes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil bin Abdul Lathif al-Bangkalani (1835–1925). The cleric who lives in Bangkalan, Madura is known for various honorary titles: Shaykh al-Jawiyyin (the great teacher of the Javanese people), Shaykh Masyayikh (the teacher of the kiai), and Waliyullah (wali of Allah). More than just titles, these names reflect the historical fact that almost all the great Indonesian scholars who lived in that era had studied with him directly or through his teachers.

However, scientific studies that systematically and comprehensively map Syaikhona Kholil's scientific network—including his teachers, pedagogical methods, students, and impact on the Islamic style of

the archipelago—are still very limited. Most of the available literature is hagiographic (guardianship history), popular biography, or focuses on a single aspect without looking at its overall structure as a scientific network. This research aims to fill this gap by asking the research question: What is the structure, mechanism, and impact of the Syaikhona Kholil Bangkalan Madura scientific network in the context of the transmission of Islamic knowledge in the archipelago in the 19th and early 20th centuries?

This research has an even stronger relevance after the awarding of the title of National Hero to Syaikhona Kholil by President Prabowo Subianto on Heroes' Day, November 10, 2025—a state recognition of his great contribution not only in the scientific field, but also in shaping the identity of the Indonesian nation through the education of Islamic boarding schools and the network of scholars he built (Kompas, 2025). Against this backdrop, an in-depth scientific study of its scientific network is becoming increasingly urgent and relevant.

### Research Methods

This research uses a historical research method combined with an intellectual history approach. Intellectual history, as defined by Skinner (2002), pays attention to the socio-intellectual context behind the emergence of ideas and their transmission from one generation to the next. This approach is relevant to analyze how Syaikhona Kholi's science is formed, transmitted, and impacted.

Social network analysis (SNA) is used in a descriptive-qualitative manner to map the teacher-student relationship as a network structure. In the study of scholarly

networks, SNA allows researchers to identify who is a 'hub' (a node with many connections), a 'broker' (a link between network clusters), and a 'periphery' (a node at the edge of the network). Syaikhona Kholil, as will be shown in the analysis, functions as a hub as well as a broker that connects the network of Haramayn scholars with the network of Islamic boarding schools of the archipelago.

Data collection was carried out through three channels: (1) manuscript studies, especially manuscripts of *Kitab as-Silah* by Kiai Ahmad Qusyairi (a student of Syaikhona Kholil) and records of diplomas stored in his descendants' Islamic boarding schools; (2) literature studies of academic works, including monographs, dissertations, and scientific journal articles; and (3) archival studies, including Dutch records of kiai and pesantren in Madura at the end of the 19th century. Data are analyzed through heuristic procedures, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography.

## Results and discussion

### 1. Biography and Socio-Historical Context of Syaikhona Kholil

#### a. Birth, Fate, and Family Environment

Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil bin Abdul Lathif was born on 9 Safar 1252 H, coinciding with May 25, 1835 AD, in Senenan Village, Kemayoran Village, Bangkalan, Madura. He comes from a family of scholars whose genealogy is connected to Sunan Gunung Jati through the path of Sayyid Sulaiman, a scholar known for spreading Islam on the coast of Madura (Muhaimin et al., 2021). This nasab places Syaikhona Kholil in the category of 'aristocratic scholars' who combine hereditary legitimacy (nasab) with scientific legitimacy (sanad)—a combination that is highly respected in the archipelago's Islamic tradition.

Syaikhona Kholil's father, KH. Abdul Lathif, is an authoritative scholar in Bangkalan. His mother, Siti Khodijah, came from a family of clerics. This family environment full of Islamic values provided a very strong foundation for Syaikhona Kholil's intellectual development from an early age. The family tradition of disciplining the reading of the Qur'an, the study of the yellow book, and the practice of Sufism became an 'informal curriculum' that shaped his scholarly character even before he officially studied with other scholars.

#### b. Extraordinary Intelligence and Early Charisma

A number of narrations told by his students and immortalized in pesantren literature agree that Syaikhona Kholil's intelligence seemed extraordinary since childhood. At a very young age, he had managed to memorize the Qur'an 30 juz along with the knowledge of tajweed and qira'ah sab'ah (seven mutawatir recitations of the Qur'an). A much rarer feat was his ability to memorize all 1,002 verses of *Alfiyah Ibn Malik's nadzam*—a verse that summarizes the entire Arabic grammar (*nahwu-sharaf*)—in a very short time (Syaikhona.net, 2025).

The ability to memorize *Alfiyah* is not just a technical achievement; It reflects tradition *hifzh* (memorization) which in classical Islam is considered a prerequisite for scholars who want to truly understand religious texts, not just read them. A person who memorizes *Alfiyah* well has a 'grammatical framework' in his mind that allows him to read Arabic books without *harakat* (*The Book of Scarlet Witches*) directly and accurately. A deep mastery of the structure of the Arabic language, as reflected through the memorization of *Alfiyah Ibn Malik*, forms an internal cognitive framework that allows a scholar to understand classical texts directly and

independently (Salsabila et al., n.d.). This is what later made Syaikhona Kholil the highest authority in the science of nahwu in the archipelago (Dhofier, 1999).

### c. Context of Colonialism and the Rise of Islamic Boarding School Scholarship

It should be understood that Syaikhona Kholil lived and worked in the context of Dutch colonialism which experienced an intensification phase in the second half of the 19th century. After the Diponegoro War (1825–1830) and various other local resistances, the Dutch East Indies Government implemented a more systematic policy to weaken the influence of the ulama, including through the Guru-Ordonantie (Teacher Regulation) policy which required kiai to register and ask for permission to teach (Noer, 1973). In this repressive context, pesantren became the most consistent space of cultural resistance—an institution that remained autonomous from the colonial education system.

Bangkalan itself during the time of Syaikhona Kholil was an area ruled by the regents of Cakraningrat who had complex relations with the Dutch. The existence of Syaikhona Kholil as a scholar who was not involved in the colonial bureaucratic structure, but instead had moral authority that went beyond administrative boundaries, made him a very influential figure in the life of the Muslim community of Madura and Java (Tirto.id, 2025).

## 2. Intellectual Genealogy: Syaikhona Kholil Teacher Network

### a. Phase of Education in Madura: Local Scientific Foundations

Syaikhona Kholil's formal education began with his own father, KH. Abdul Lathif, who taught the basics of Qur'anic knowledge, basic fiqh, and introduction to Arabic grammar. After completing his basic

education, he went on to more advanced Islamic boarding schools in Madura:

11	Teacher's Name	Location/Islamic Boarding School	Knowledge Gained
1	KH. Abdul Lathif (father)	Bangkalan	The Basis of the Qur'an, Fiqh, Nahwu
2	Tuan Guru Dawuh (Bujuk Dawuh)	Malajeh Village, Bangkalan	Tools (Arabic grammar)
3	The Great Teacher (Scotland)	Bangkalan	Sufism and Sufism
4	KH. Muqoddas bin Abdul Karim	Sembilangan, Bangkalan	Fiqh and Ushul Fiqh
5	KH. Muhammad Nur	Langitan Islamic Boarding School, Tuban	Hadith and rijal
6	Kiai Asyik	Cangaan Islamic Boarding School, Bangil	Nahwu and mantiq (logic)
7	Kiai Nur Hasan	Sidogiri Islamic Boarding School, Pasuruan	Fiqh Shafi'i and Tafsir
8	Salafi Islamic Boarding School Scholars	São Paulo	Sufism and thariqah

Table 1. Syaikhona Kholil Teachers in Madura and Java

The journey of teaching from one pesantren to another reflects the tradition of rihlah 'ilmiyyah which has been rooted in the Islamic scientific tradition. Each pesantren provides its own scientific specialization. The Langitan Tuban Islamic Boarding School, for example, is known as a center for hadith science, while the Sidogiri Pasuruan Islamic Boarding School is one of the oldest

centers of Shafi'i fiqh in Java (Dhofier, 1999). By studying at these various Islamic boarding schools, Syaikhona Kholil built a multidisciplinary scientific base before continuing to the highest level—teaching directly in Makkah.

b. Phase of Education in Makkah: Connections with Global Ulema Network

Around the 1850s, Syaikhona Kholil went to Makkah to deepen his knowledge. There he studied with a number of great scholars who were the nodes of the global Islamic scientific network in the 19th century. His period in Makkah lasted several years, before he returned to Bangkalan around 1863. The learning experience in *Haramayn* was a crucial point that raised Syaikhona Kholil's intellectual position from the regional level to the transnational level (Azra, 2004).

The most influential teachers of Syaikhona Kholil in Makkah include:

No.	Teacher's Name	Origin/Position	Areas of Expertise
1	Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani (d. 1897)	Banten/Makkah – Nusantara scholars in Makkah	Fiqh, tafsir, Sufism, hadith
2	Sayyid Ahmad bin Zaini Dahlan (d. 1886)	Makkah – Grand Mufti of the Shafi'i School	Fiqh, dates (Islamic history), Sufism
3	Shaykh Uthman bin Hasan Ad-Dimyathi	Egypt/Makkah	Hadith, the knowledge of rijal
4	Shaykh Musthafa bin Muhammad Al-Afifi Al-Makki	Makkah	Nahwu, sharaf, balaghah
5	Shaykh Abdul Hamid bin Mahmud	Makkah	Fiqh and ushul fiqh Shafi'i

Ash-Syarwani		
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Table 2. Syaikhona Kholil Teachers in Makkah

Of all the teachers of Shaykh Kholil in Makkah, Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani (Muhammad Nawawi bin Umar al-Jawi) was the most influential. Nawawi al-Bantani was an archipelago scholar who lived in Makkah and was known as '*Sayyid Ulama al-Hijaz*' (leader of the Hijaz scholars) in his time. He wrote more than 115 books in Arabic which are used as a reference in Islamic boarding schools throughout the archipelago to this day (Snouck Hurgronje, 1906, in Azra, 2004). Through Nawawi al-Bantani, Syaikhona Kholil was connected to the network of Haramayn scholars which also included Ibrahim al-Kurani, Mulla Ibrahim and the transmission lines of hadith and fiqh from the Middle East to the archipelago.

Studying with Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan, who at that time served as the Grand Mufti of the Shafi'i School in Makkah, gave Syaikhona Kholil a scientific diploma with the highest authority in Shafi'i jurisprudence. *This diploma* —a kind of 'academic certification' in the tradition of Islamic scholars—became a formal legitimacy that allowed Shaykhona Kholil to teach and issue fatwas with a continuous sanad (*muttasil*) to Imam Shafi'i and the Prophet PBUH.

c. Syaikhona Kholil's Position in the Global Scientific Network Map

From the analysis of his teachers, it is clear that Syaikhona Kholil succeeded in consolidating two major paths of Islamic scientific transmission: the path *Haramayn* (via Nawawi al-Bantani and Zaini Dahlan) and *Nusantara Islamic Boarding School* (through Langitan, Sidogiri, and Islamic boarding schools in Madura). These two paths he then synthesized into a scientific model that combines the depth of classical

texts (*The Book of Revelation*) with the sensitivity of the local context of the archipelago. A deep mastery of Arabic grammar, as exemplified by Syaikhona Kholil through Alfiyah memorization, is the main foundation that Islamic boarding schools have historically used to understand the classical books of Islam. (Bilqisti & Bakar, 2025). Azra (2004) called this pattern a characteristic of the archipelago's ulama network: the ability to absorb Middle Eastern scientific traditions without losing the roots of local traditions.

### 3. Bangkalan Islamic Boarding School: Architecture of Scientific Transmission Institutions

#### a. History of the Establishment and Development of Islamic Boarding Schools

After returning from Makkah around 1863, Syaikhona Kholil immediately established an institutional base to transmit his knowledge. At least three phases of the establishment of an Islamic boarding school can be identified from various sources:

Phase	Name of Islamic Boarding School	Year of Establishment	Remarks
I	West Kademangan Islamic Boarding School	±1861 (before going to Makkah)	Submitted to KH. Muntaha (son-in-law) after growing rapidly
II	Al-Muntaha Islamic Boarding School, Jengkebuan	±1873	Pesantren specializing in equipment sciences; Passed on to son-in-law
III	Demangan Islamic Boarding	±1875–1880	The main and largest Islamic boarding

School, Bangkalan	school; Nusantara Scientific Network Center
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Table 3. The Phase of the Establishment of Islamic Boarding Schools by Syaikhona Kholil

Demangan Bangkalan Islamic Boarding School—which later became known as the Syaikhona Moh Islamic Boarding School. Kholil—became the epicenter of Syaikhona Kholil's scientific network. The geographical location of Bangkalan which is located at the western tip of Madura and directly opposite Surabaya (the largest trade and transit center in East Java) makes it very strategic as a meeting point for students from various directions: from East Java, Central Java, West Java, and even from other islands in the archipelago.

#### b. Curriculum and Scientific Disciplines Taught

The teaching curriculum at the Syaikhona Kholil Islamic boarding school is comprehensive and covers almost all branches of classical Islamic science. Based on the history of his students, the scientific disciplines taught include:

Fields of Science	Books Studied	Remarks
Nahwu and Sharaf	Alfiyah Ibn Malik, Messenger, Imrithy, Mutammimah	Syaikhona Kholil is considered the highest authority of nahwu in the archipelago
Fiqh of Madhhab Shafi'i	Fath al-Qarib, Fath al-Mu'in, Minhaj al-Thalibin, Al-um	Oriented to practical fiqh (fiqh al-'amali) and contextual
Ushul Fiqh	Al-Waraqat, Jam'ul Jawami'	Methods of excavating Islamic law from its sources

Tafsir of the Qur'an	Tafsir Jalalayn, Tafsir al-Khazin	Approach to tafsir bi al-ma'tsur (narration)
The Science of Hadith	Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Riyadh as-Shalihin	With an emphasis on sanad and the science of rijal
Sufism	Ihya Ulum al-Din (Al-Ghazali), Al-Hikam (Ibn Athaillah)	Sunni Sufism Approach (al-Tasawwuf al-Sunni)
Balaghah	Al-Jawhar al-Maknun, Uqud al-Juman	The science of rhetoric and the beauty of Arabic
Mantiq (Logic)	Sullam al-Munawwaq, Idhah al-Mubham	Classical Islamic formal logic
Astronomy	Sullamun Nayyirain	Islamic astronomy for determining the time of worship
Thariqah (Practical Sufism)	Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah	Syaikhona Kholil holds the diploma of two thariqah

Table 4. Scientific Disciplines and Books Taught at the Syaikhona Kholil Islamic Boarding School

The breadth of this curriculum reflects the tradition of *the scientific encyclopedia* of classical Islamic scholars, where a true scholar (*'alim rabbani*) is expected to master all branches of Islamic science, not just narrow specializations. Nevertheless, Syaikhona Kholil has the most prominent specialization in two fields: nahwu-sharaf and Sufism. In nahwu, it is considered unparalleled in the archipelago. In Sufism, he combined two great thariqahs: Qadiriyyah (which was rooted in Shaykh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani) and Naqsyabandiyyah (which was rooted in Bahauddin an-Naqsyabandi)—a synthesis that came to be known as Thariqah Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyyah (TQN) (Syaichona.net, 2025).

The breadth of the curriculum that covers almost all branches of classical

Islamic science cannot be separated from the central role of the Arabic language as its main driver. Arabic in the context of the Syaikhona Kholil Islamic boarding school functions not only as a medium for the delivery of knowledge, but also as a gateway to expand scientific horizons while strengthening the moral and spiritual values of the students. A deep mastery of Arabic allows students to access primary Islamic sources directly without relying on translations that often lose their nuances and depth of meaning (Syaputri et al., 2025).

#### c. Pedagogical Method: Personalization and Uniqueness of Educating

One of the most interesting aspects of the Syaikhona Kholil Islamic boarding school is its pedagogical method which is very personal and individualistic. Unlike the modern classical system that teaches the same thing to all students, Syaikhona Kholil is known to educate each student according to their respective potential, character, and 'maqam'. The accounts of his disciples describe some of these unique methods:

First, the method of puzzles and sudden tests (*ikhtibarat mufaji'ah*). Syaikhona Kholil often asks questions that seem irrelevant or strange to test the intelligence and thinking agility of students. KH. Hasyim Ash'ari, for example, is said to have been tested with very complicated Arabic grammatical questions, and his ability to answer perfectly made Shaikhona Kholil give him a teaching diploma in a very short time (NU Online, 2025).

Second, the method of 'barakah and signals' (*al-itanda al-ruhiyyah*). Syaikhona Kholil is known to give assignments that seem not directly related to science, but contain a dimension of deep spiritual education. The story of giving beads to KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin to be conveyed to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, with his wirid all the way

from Bangkalan to Jombang, is a real example of this method of spiritual education. Through this method, Syaikhona Kholil not only transmits textual knowledge, but also mentality, spirituality, and vision of civilization (CNN Indonesia, 2026).

Third, the use of poetry and nadzam as a medium of memorization. The tradition of memorizing important texts in the form of verses (nadzam) is a classic method that Syaikhona Kholil applied very intensively. His mastery of thousands of nadzam stanzas from various scientific disciplines makes him a model of a 'walking encyclopedia' that can cite references accurately and quickly in various contexts of scientific discussion.

This pedagogical approach that prioritizes the formation of morals before knowledge is not exclusive to Syaikhona Kholil. In the Islamic scientific tradition of the archipelago, the same pattern is found in Guru Sekumpul in South Kalimantan, who in each of his studies always emphasizes that the core of Islamic education is to know Allah, practice knowledge, and worship sincerely (Kholik et al., 2025). This shows that the morality-based pedagogical model is a characteristic of the network of ahlussunnah wal jamaah scholars of the archipelago in general, not just a local phenomenon of Madura-Java.

#### d. Social Dynamics of Islamic Boarding Schools: Students as Scientific Community

The Syaikhona Kholil Islamic Boarding School is not just an educational institution; it is a scholarly community that functions similarly to the large madrassas in Baghdad in the Abbasid era or the Sufi zawiyahs in Morocco and Egypt. The students not only learn knowledge, but also live in a community that has its own norms, values, and traditions.

The manuscript of Kitab as-Silah by Kiai Ahmad Qusyairi notes that Syaikhona Kholil's students were very ethnically and geographically heterogeneous: Madurese, Javanese, Sundanese, and some Malays. This diversity reflects Syaikhona Kholil's appeal that transcends ethnic and geographical boundaries. The students from Sunda who carry out the tradition of '*ngetan*' (wandering to East Java) make the Bangkalan Islamic boarding school one of the mandatory destinations, as is the case with the Tremas Islamic Boarding School (Pacitan) and then the Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School (Jombang) (Green Jacket, 2025).

#### 4. Student Network: A Map of the Dissemination of Knowledge in the Archipelago

##### a. Scale and Reach of Student Networks

The most important dimension of Syaikhona Kholil's scientific network is the breadth of the spread of his students who later became influential scholars throughout the archipelago. According to the records of Syaikhona Kholil's descendants immortalized by Muhaimin et al. (2021), more than 500,000 people once studied with him—an astonishing number if we consider the conditions of communication and transportation in the 19th century. Among this very large number, about 3,000 of them became recognized scholars (imam alim) and became role models in their respective communities.

This figure must be understood in the context of the tradition of pesantren where 'teaching' does not have to be in the long term. A student who attended for several days, attended Syaikhona Kholil's knowledge council, received a diploma of one book, and then spread the knowledge in his village was already counted as a student. However, there is a more intensive category

of students: those who live in the Bangkalan Islamic boarding school for months or years and obtain comprehensive diplomas from various scientific disciplines.

#### b. Key Students and Their Institutional Impact

Of the thousands of students of Syaikhona Kholil, there are a number of names that later became the main pillars of Indonesian Islam. The following is a map of the most influential students and the institutional impact they generate:

No.	Pupil Name	Islamic Boarding Schools/Established Institutions	Key Contributions
1	Hadratussyaikh KH. M. Hasyim Asy'ari (Jombang, 1871–1947)	Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School, Jombang (1899); Nahdlatul Ulama (1926)	Founder of NU; National Heroes; author of the book Adab al-'Alim wal-Muta'allim
2	KH. Abdul Wahab Chasbullah (Jombang, 1888–1971)	Tambakberas Islamic Boarding School, Jombang; Nahdlatul Ulama	The main architect of the establishment of NU; Islamic nationalist figures
3	KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin (Situbondo, 1897–1990)	Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Islamic Boarding School, Situbondo	National Heroes; The largest caregiver of the Islamic boarding school in Situbondo
4	KH. Bisri Syansuri (Jombang, 1886–1980)	Denanyar Islamic Boarding School, Jombang	One of the founders of NU; Leading Jurists

5	KH. Abdul Karim Manaf (Lirboyo)	Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School, Kediri (1910)	The founder of the pesantren with thousands of students; one of Indonesia's largest Islamic boarding schools
6	KH. Ma'shum Ahmad (Lasem, Rembang)	Al-Hidayah Lasem Islamic Boarding School	Fiqh and hadith scholars; disseminator of knowledge in northern Central Java
7	KH. Hasan Mustafa (Garut, 1852–1930)	Islamic Boarding School in Garut; The Great Leader of the Army	Syaikhona Kholil is a disseminator of knowledge in Sundanese Tatars; Arabic Literature
8	KH. Abdullah Sajjad (Swedish, Swedish)	Islamic Boarding School in Sumenep, Madura	Transmission of knowledge to the Sumenep Madura region
9	KH. Abdul Hamid bin Itsbat (Lasem)	Islamic Boarding School in Lasem, Central Java	Dissemination of knowledge to the Lasem-Rembang area
10	KH. Khozin (Buduran, Sidoarjo)	Islamic Boarding School in Sidoarjo	Transmission to the Sidoarjo area and its surroundings

Table 5. Syaikhona Kholil's Main Students and Their Institutional Impact

#### c. In-Depth Case: KH. Hasyim Asy'ari and Scientific Transmission

The scientific relationship between Syaikhona Kholil and KH. Hasyim Asy'ari is the most documented and most influential case in this network. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (1871–1947) came to Bangkalan after previously studying at the Wonokoyo Pasuruan Islamic Boarding School, the Siwalan Panji Sidoarjo Islamic Boarding School, the Langitan Tuban Islamic Boarding School, and several other Islamic boarding schools. When he studied with

Syaikhona Kholil, he was already a very qualified student. However, Syaikhona Kholil treated him in a very distinctive way: he did not directly teach the great books, but asked Hasyim Ash'ari to lead prayers, sound the adhan, and perform *the tasks of khidmah* (devotion) first—an approach to character education that prioritizes the formation of *morals* before *'ilm* (Muhaimin et al., 2021).

After Hasyim Asy'ari established the Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School in Jombang in 1899, Syaikhona Kholil actively sent his students to continue their education there. This pattern of 'student redistribution' shows that Syaikhona Kholi's scientific network is not centralistic (all must study in Bangkalan), but dynamic and decentralised—a network that continues to grow and creates new nodes in various regions.

d. Student Network in Sundanese Tatar: Expansion to West Java

Syaikhona Kholi's scientific network is not only limited to East Java and Madura, but also reaches the Sundanese Tatars (West Java) through the 'ngetan' tradition. Among his students from the Land of Sunda, the most influential was KH. Hasan Mustafa (Garut, 1852–1930), a scholar who was also known as a Sundanese writer and once served as the Penghulu Besar of Priangan. Through KH. Hasan Mustafa, Syaikhona Kholil's scientific sanad spread to a network of Islamic boarding schools throughout the Priangan area (Kusdiana, 2014).

Idris' research (2025) revealed that Ajengan Shobari Ciwedus Kuningan (d. 1916) was one of Syaikhona Kholil's disciples from the Sundanese Tatar who later became an influential scholar in the Kuningan and Cirebon areas. The Sukamiskin Bandung Islamic Boarding School founded by KH. Rd. Muhammad bin

Alqo (d. 1911) is also recorded to have a scientific connection with the Bangkalan network. Thus, Syaikhona Kholi's scientific footprint in Sundanese Tatars stretches from the East Priangan area to the northern coast of West Java (West Java NU Online, 2025; Green Jacket, 2025).

## 5. The Strategic Role of Syaikhona Kholil in the Establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama

a. Historical Context of the Rise of Islamic Organizations

In the second decade of the 20th century, the global Islamic world was being shaken by various currents of thought: the Pan-Islamist movement of Jamaluddin al-Afghani, the Islamic Modernism of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Ridha in Egypt, and Wahhabism which became increasingly dominant in Arabia after the fall of the Ottoman Dynasty. In Indonesia, these currents gave rise to various modern organizations: Sarekat Islam (1912), Muhammadiyah (1912), and various other local organizations. In the midst of this dynamic, Javanese traditionalist scholars—who feel that their fiqh and Sufism traditions are threatened—feel the urgency to form an organizational forum that can protect and preserve the tradition of *ahlussunnah wal jamaah*.

b. Blessings and Gestures of Syaikhona Kholil: NU's Spiritual Legitimacy

Syaikhona Kholil's role in the establishment of NU is not technical-organizational, but more spiritual-legitimate. As a teacher of almost all the scholars who later founded NU, his blessing has a very large moral weight. The most famous of these is the story of two messengers:

First, around 1924–1925, Syaikhona Kholil called KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin and asked him to bring a stick to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari was given a certain wirid. This stick

is considered a symbol of 'leadership relay' and 'blessing' from Syaikhona Kholil to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari to lead the traditionalist ulema movement.

Second, Syaikhona Kholil again sent KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin brought a prayer bead to KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, with the order to practice the wirid 'Ya Jabbar, Ya Qahhar' along the way from Bangkalan to Jombang. This prayer bead is interpreted as a symbol of spiritual consolidation and readiness to face 'hard forces' that may hinder the birth of the organization. These histories, although they have a hagiographic dimension, reflect the socio-religious reality that the blessing of charismatic scholars such as Syaikhona Kholil is a prerequisite that cannot be ignored for the birth of an Islamic movement rooted in Islamic boarding schools (CNN Indonesia, 2026).

#### c. Student Network as NU Social Infrastructure

An aspect that often escapes the attention of researchers is the fact that Syaikhona Kholil's student network directly became the social infrastructure that formed the initial body of Nahdlatul Ulama. The founders and main movers of NU are almost all direct disciples of Syaikhona Kholil or disciples of his disciples. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari as the first Rais Akbar (supreme chairman), KH. Abdul Wahab Chasbullah as the first Katib (secretary), KH. Bisri Syansuri as a member of the syuro council—all of them were disciples of Syaikhona Kholil.

This means that the network of Islamic boarding schools that Syaikhona Kholil has built for more than 40 years organically transformed into a network of NU organizations. Communication between Islamic boarding schools that has been firmly established through the teacher-student bond (sanad) has become an effective channel for mass mobilization. In Bourdieu's

sociological language, the 'social capital' that has been accumulated by Syaikhona Kholil through his scientific network is converted into 'organizational capital' for NU (Bourdieu, 1986, in Hakim et al., 2020).

#### 6. The Impact of Scientific Networks on the Islamic Pattern of the Archipelago

##### a. Moderate and Accommodative Islam: The Pedagogical Legacy of Syaikhona Kholil

One of the most important impacts of Syaikhona Kholil's scientific network is the formation of a mainstream of Islam in the archipelago that is moderate, tolerant, and accommodating to local traditions. Through his disciples who spread throughout the archipelago, Syaikhona Kholil's version of ahlussunnah wal jamaah Islamic values—which combine strict adherence to Shafi'i fiqh with openness to the spirituality of Sufism and respect for local traditions—became the dominant pattern of Indonesian Islam (Dhofier, 1999).

This pattern differs significantly from Wahhabi purification, which rejects local traditions, and liberal modernism, which tends to revise fiqh substantially. Syaikhona Kholil's version of Islam is an Islam that is firm in textual traditions (classical fiqh texts) but flexible in dealing with local socio-cultural realities—an approach that in contemporary terminology is called 'archipelago Islam' or 'Islam wasathiyah' (Azra, 2004; Muhaimin et al., 2021).

##### b. Influence in the Formation of National Identity

Syaikhona Kholil's scientific network also contributed significantly to the formation of Indonesian national identity. Through his students who were active in the national movement—especially KH. Hasyim Asy'ari who issued the Jihad Resolution of October 22, 1945 which mobilized students to defend Indonesian independence from Dutch aggression—the Islamic values

transmitted by Syaikhona Kholil turned out to be compatible with the values of Indonesian nationalism.

This compatibility is no coincidence. In Shaykhona Kholil's teachings, love for the homeland is an integral part of faith—a view rooted in the hadith '*hubb al-wathan min al-iman*' (love for the homeland is part of faith). Through internalizing this value to thousands of his students, Syaikhona Kholil indirectly prepares a generation of scholar-fighters who are ready to sacrifice their souls and bodies for Indonesia's independence (Tirto.id, 2025).

#### c. Sustainable Institutional Heritage

The legacy of Syaikhona Kholil's scientific network did not end with his death in April 1925. Through the institutions founded by his students—NU, large Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and other Islamic educational institutions—his influence continues to be felt until contemporary Indonesia. Nahdlatul Ulama, which now has more than 90 million members, is the largest institutional legacy of the scientific network that Syaikhona Kholil built.

Tebuireng Islamic Boarding School (KH. Hasyim Asy'ari), Lirboyo Islamic Boarding School (KH. Abdul Karim), Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Islamic Boarding School (KHR. As'ad Syamsul Arifin), Denanyar Islamic Boarding School (KH. Bisri Syansuri), and hundreds of other Islamic boarding schools founded by Syaikhona Kholil students are now Islamic educational institutions that serve millions of students. In other words, the scientific network pioneered by Syaikhona Kholil has transformed into Indonesia's most extensive and influential Islamic education system.

### 7. Theoretical Analysis: Syaikhona Kholil as a Hub for Scientific Networks

#### a. Social Network Approach in Ulema Studies

To understand Syaikhona Kholil's position more analytically, we can use the *Social Network Analysis* (SNA) framework. In network theory, an actor who has multiple connections to a variety of different clusters is called a *hub* or *broker*. A *hub* has a high degree of centrality (many direct connections), while a *broker* has a high 'centrality of betweenness' (connecting groups that were previously unconnected). Syaikhona Kholil met both of these criteria at once: he had thousands of direct students (high centrality) and connected the network of Haramayn scholars with the network of Nusantara Islamic boarding schools (high centrality).

This analysis is parallel to the concept of *common link* in the science of hadith—a narrator who becomes the point of convergence of various paths of sanad. Hadith expert G.H.A. Juynboll introduced the concept of *common links* to identify the narrator responsible for the spread of a particular hadith to various paths. In the context of a scientific network, Syaikhona Kholil functions as a *common link* from which various scientific sanad paths spread throughout the archipelago. The manuscript of *Al-Iqd Al-Farid* by Shaykh Yasin al-Fadani explicitly states that the scientific sanad of the majority of Indonesian scholars in the 19th–20th centuries boiled down to two figures: Shaykh Kholil Bangkalan and Shaykh Mahfuzh Termas (NU Online, 2025).

#### b. Comparison with the Haramayn Ulama Network

The position of Syaikhona Kholil in the context of the archipelago can be compared to the position of Ibrahim al-Kurani (1615–1690) in the network of Haramayn scholars studied by Azra (2004).

Al-Kurani was a great scholar in Medina who became a teacher for many scholars from various parts of the Islamic world who later returned to their respective countries and established scientific institutions. Like al-Kurani, Syaikhona Kholil functioned as a point of accumulation and redistribution of knowledge—he collected knowledge from various sources (Makkah, Java, Madura), synthesized it, and redistributed it to hundreds of thousands of disciples who then spread it throughout the archipelago.

The main difference between the two is that al-Kurani operates in an international network (from Haramayn to the rest of the Islamic world), while Syaikhona Kholil operates primarily on an archipelago scale—but with an intensity and impact that is no less significant in its context. In Azra's (2004) terminology, Syaikhona Kholil is the 'leader of a local ulema network' that connects the 'global ulama network' (Haramayn) with the 'regional ulama network' (Nusantara Islamic boarding school).

### **Conclusion**

This research has comprehensively mapped the scientific network of Syaikhona Muhammad Kholil Bangkalan Madura in four main dimensions: intellectual genealogy, Islamic boarding school institutions, student networks, and the impact on the Islamic style of the archipelago. From the analysis carried out, several main conclusions can be drawn:

First, Syaikhona Kholil succeeded in building a solid and multidimensional scientific sanad through gradual learning from scholars in Madura, various Islamic boarding schools in Java, and finally Haramayn scholars in Makkah—especially Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani and Sayyid Ahmad Zaini Dahlan. This process of scientific accumulation makes it a

'convergence node' between the scientific tradition of Haramayn and the tradition of the archipelago. Second, the pesantren he founded in Bangkalan—especially the Demangan Islamic Boarding School—functions as a comprehensive 'Islamic science academy', with a curriculum covering all classical Islamic disciplines and pedagogical methods that are highly personalized and contextual. The uniqueness of this method makes the Bangkalan Islamic boarding school an unparalleled scientific destination in the archipelago at that time.

Third, his students who are spread throughout the archipelago—with KH. Hasyim Asy'ari was the most influential—transforming Syaikhona Kholil's scientific heritage into the most comprehensive Indonesian Islamic education system. The establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926 was the largest institutional manifestation of the scientific network he built. Fourth, from the perspective of social network analysis, Syaikhona Kholil functions as a hub and broker as well as in the Islamic scientific network of the archipelago—a position analogous to that of Ibrahim al-Kurani in the network of 17th-century Haramayn scholars. Through this strategic position, he formed a moderate, tolerant, and ahlussunnah wal jamaah style of Islam in the archipelago, which until now has become the dominant trend of Indonesian Islam.

This study recommends a follow-up study that uses the SNA method more quantitatively to map this network visually and measurably. In addition, in-depth research on the manuscripts stored in the pesantrens descended from Syaikhona Kholil is also very necessary to complete the historical picture of the scientific network of this great scholar of the archipelago.

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