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Research Article

Sadd al-Dharīʿah and Wasaṭiyyah as Complementary Frameworks for Shielding Tawhid: Tracing the Stages from Ghuluw to Shirk

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Abstract
This study investigates sadd al-dharīʿah—the principle of blocking means that lead to prohibited acts—as a systematic framework for shielding tawḥīd from the paths leading to shirk through ghuluw. While previous studies have examined ghuluw and shirk from various perspectives, none has positioned sadd al-dharīʿah as a principal analytical lens or derived operational criteria for distinguishing legitimate veneration (taʿẓīm mashrūʿ) from prohibited excess (ghuluw muḥarram). Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a combined deductive–inductive content analysis, the study draws on primary Islamic sources, classical works on uṣūl al-fiqh and ʿaqīdah, and contemporary peer-reviewed scholarship. The findings reveal four stages of ghuluw—emotional attachment, excessive veneration, ritualization, and shirk—each presenting a distinct point of intervention; three operational criteria—object, form, and belief—for distinguishing legitimate veneration from prohibited excess; and the demonstration that wasaṭiyyah and sadd al-dharīʿah function as complementary mechanisms for preserving tawḥīd. Unlike previous studies that treat sadd al-dharīʿah as a supporting argument, this study positions it as a principal analytical

lens, offering a new narrative that reframes ghuluw as a dynamic process and positions wasaṭiyyah as a protective framework for authentic tawḥīd.

Keywords: Sadd al-Dharīʿah, Wasaṭiyyah, Tawḥīd, Ghuluw, Shirk.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Muslim world faces a paradoxical challenge: while tawḥīd remains the undisputed core of Islamic faith, practices that compromise its purity continue to proliferate under the guise of devotion. From exaggerated veneration of saints and scholars to the ritualistic use of amulets and talismans, contemporary expressions of religiosity often blur the boundary between legitimate veneration (taʿẓīm mashrūʿ) and prohibited excess (ghuluw muḥarram). This blurring is not merely a theological abstraction; it has concrete consequences, as excessive veneration can gradually lead to shirk—the very antithesis of tawḥīd Mifdalulkiram et al., *The Danger of Ghuluw: When Excessive Veneration of The Righteous Becomes a Path To Polytheism*; Sinatra et al., *EL-FIKR: JURNAL AQIDAH DAN FILSAFAT ISLAM*. In an era marked by religious extremism on one hand and syncretic practices on the other, the need for a systematic framework to safeguard the purity of tawḥīd has become increasingly urgent Esposito, *The Future of Islam*, vol. 40; Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*.

Within Islamic theological discourse, tawḥīd is commonly categorized into three interconnected dimensions: tawḥīd al-rubūbiyyah (the recognition of Allah as the sole Creator and Sustainer), tawḥīd al-ulūhiyyah (directing all worship exclusively to Allah), and tawḥīd al-asmāʾ wa al-ṣifāt (affirming Allah's names and attributes) (Al-Bayhaqi, 1999; Ibn Taymiyyah, 2021). These dimensions are not merely doctrinal categories but constitute a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between the Creator and creation. Recent studies have explored the pedagogical and practical implications of this framework in various contexts, including English for Islamic studies Nuha et al., *La Ilaha Illallah: Understanding Tawhid and Its Practice in English for Islamic Studies*., linguistic-semantic analysis of the shahādah Muhammad Nafis et al., "A LINGUISTIC–SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF THE PHRASE LAA ILAHA ILLALLAH IN KITAB AT-TAWHID AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ARABIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION." and its role in fostering inner peace Mardiah et al., "Tauhid As The Foundation of Inner Peace: A Study from The Perspective of The Qur'an and Islamic Psychology.". Preserving the purity of this framework is essential, as any deviation—whether in belief or practice—undermines the very foundation of Islamic faith Azahra et al., "The Concept and Virtue of Tauhid in Kitab At-Tauhid by Shaykh Muhammad Bin Abdul-Wahhab: An Analytical Study of Chapters One and Two.".

One of the most significant deviations from tawḥīd is shirk, which is classified into two categories: shirk akbar (major shirk) and shirk asghar (minor shirk) Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. While shirk akbar involves associating partners with Allah in matters exclusively attributed to Him, shirk asghar encompasses lesser forms of deviation that do not reach the level of major shirk Aisyah and Melati, "Understanding Shirk in The Qur'an and Sunnah.". Contemporary scholarship has examined shirk in various manifestations, including the practice of visiting the

graves of pious figures Ridho et al., "The Concept of Shirk in Tafsir and Hadith: A Salafi Critical Analysis of the Practice of Visiting the Graves of Pious Figures in Muslim Society.", the act of seeking from other than Allah Bukhari et al., "SLAUGHTERING FOR OTHER THAN ALLAH IN THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE.", and the reconstruction of the concept in the digital era Sinatra et al., *EL-FIKR: JURNAL AQIDAH DAN FILSAFAT ISLAM*. Crucially, the path to shirk is rarely sudden; it often develops gradually through excessive attitudes and practices in religious matters, known as ghuluw (Al-ʿUthaymīn, 2020; Mifdalulkiram et al., 2025).

Ghuluw, derived from the Arabic root meaning "to exceed a limit," refers to going beyond the boundaries in praise, worship, and good deeds Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*. In Islamic theological discourse, ghuluw is not merely an ethical lapse but a dangerous deviation that can lead to more serious transgressions, including shirk (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2021; Mifdalulkiram et al., 2025). The Qur'an explicitly prohibits ghuluw in Surah al-Nisāʾ (4):171: "O People of the Book! Do not go to extremes regarding your faith; say nothing about Allah except the truth." This verse establishes a clear principle: the prevention of ghuluw is not optional but obligatory. Recent studies have examined related concepts such as istiʿādhah Luqman and Kadiatmaja, "The Jurisprudence of Protection.", istighāthah Fasya et al., *A Classical Study on Istighāthah and the Boundaries of Shirk in Islamic Creed*; Mahendrik et al., "A Critical Analysis of The Salaf Scholars Perspective on Istighatsah.", and al-jibt Heri et al., "Understanding of Al-Jibt (Magic) in The Perspective of Hadith"; Ryan Pratama and Pranoto Kadiatmaja, "AL-JIBT IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF FIRANDA ANDIRJA: Concept and Classification.", all of which illustrate the ongoing relevance of these theological boundaries in contemporary Muslim societies.

Despite the recognized role of preventive principles in Islamic law, the application of sadd al-dharīʿah—the principle of blocking means that lead to prohibited acts Nurhikmah et al., "Implementation of Sadd Al-Dhari'ah in Preventing Detrimental Practices by Debt Collectors towards Customers in Indonesia," 2025. Sanata, *Urgensi Sadd Adz-Dzari'ah Dalam Mengatasi Masalah Perekonomian Indonesia | Cakrawala Repositori IMWI*.—to the problem of ghuluw and shirk has not been examined systematically. Sadd al-dharīʿah serves as a dynamic instrument that complements maṣlaḥah mursalah, enabling Islamic law to remain relevant in addressing contemporary challenges Suhaimi et al., "AL-MAQÂSHID AL-SYARÎ'AH.". However, existing studies have tended to treat sadd al-dharīʿah as a supporting argument rather than a principal analytical lens. Harits et al. (2025) examine sadd al-dharīʿah as one instrument within Ibn Baz's broader argumentation against worshipping created beings, while Mifdalulkiram et al. (2025) trace how excessive veneration of the righteous becomes a path to polytheism. Ridho et al. (2026) analyze the practice of visiting graves from a Salafi critical perspective, and Fasya et al. (2025) explore the boundaries of shirk in istighāthah. Across these studies, sadd al-dharīʿah remains a supporting argument rather than the principal analytical lens, and none derives operational criteria distinguishing legitimate veneration (taʿẓīm mashrūʿ) from prohibited excess (ghuluw muḥarram) that would apply across different objects of veneration Harits et al., "A Tawhid Analysis Of Worshiping Created Beings In Shaykh Ibn Baz's View"; Mifdalulkiram et al., *The*

Danger of Ghuluw: When Excessive Veneration of The Righteous Becomes a Path To Polytheism; Ridho et al., "The Concept of Shirk in Tafsir and Hadith: A Salafi Critical Analysis of the Practice of Visiting the Graves of Pious Figures in Muslim Society"; Fasya et al., *A Classical Study on Istighāthah and the Boundaries of Shirk in Islamic Creed*.

This gap is significant for three reasons. First, without a systematic framework, the boundary between legitimate veneration and prohibited excess remains ambiguous, leaving room for both excessive rigor and excessive laxity. Second, the absence of operational criteria makes it difficult for scholars, jurists, and educators to address contemporary practices that may lead to shirk. Third, the lack of a preventive framework undermines the principle of wasaṭiyyah (moderation), which is essential for preserving the balance between proper veneration and religious excess Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah*.

To address this gap, this study investigates the application of sadd al-dharīʿah as a systematic framework for shielding tawḥīd from the paths leading to shirk through ghuluw. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. How can sadd al-dharīʿah be systematically applied to trace the stages by which ghuluw progresses from emotional attachment to acts of worship?
2. What normative criteria can be derived to distinguish legitimate veneration (taʿẓīm mashrūʿ) from prohibited excess (ghuluw muḥarram) across different objects of veneration?
3. How does wasaṭiyyah function as a protective framework that preserves the balance between proper veneration and religious excess?

By integrating Qur'anic exegesis, the Prophet's hadith, and contemporary analysis, this study provides a normative framework for distinguishing between legitimate veneration and prohibited excess, thereby fostering wasaṭiyyah as a protective framework for authentic tawḥīd. The study is limited to the Sunni tradition, with particular attention to the Ḥanbalī and Shāfiʿī schools of jurisprudence, and focuses on practices prevalent in Southeast Asia, where syncretic and excessive forms of veneration have been documented Md Yusoff et al., "The Concept of Ghulūw in Islam." Suhaimi et al., "AL-MAQÂSHID AL-SYARÎ'AH.".

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the application of *sadd al-*dharīʿah as a systematic framework for protecting *tawḥīd* from pathways that may lead to *shirk* through *ghuluw*. A qualitative approach is employed because this study focuses on systematically understanding, interpreting, and describing theological and normative concepts found in Islamic sources. The study uses a library research method, as the data are obtained from various written sources relevant to *tawḥīd*, *shirk*, *ghuluw*, *sadd al-dharīʿah*, and *wasaṭiyyah*.

The data sources primarily consist of scholarly journal articles and academic studies, supported by classical Islamic works, Prophetic hadith, and the Qur'an. Journal articles and academic studies are used to examine contemporary discussions and various scholarly perspectives on *tawḥīd*, *shirk*, *ghuluw*, *sadd al-dharīʿah*, and

wasaṭiyyah. In particular, studies on *sadd al-dharīʿah* indicate that this principle can be understood as a preventive approach aimed at blocking means that may potentially lead to harm, while its status as a *ḥujjah* in Islamic law has been a subject of discussion among scholars and academics (Na'mah, 2015; Sarumpaet S Tanjung, 2024). Classical Islamic works are used to provide theological and jurisprudential perspectives on these concepts, while relevant Prophetic hadith and Qur'anic verses are examined to identify the normative foundations concerning veneration, worship, religious excess, and the prevention of practices that may lead to *shirk* (Qur'an, Q.S. al-Nisā' [4]:171; Q.S. al-Mā'idah [5]:77).

Data were collected through documentation techniques by selecting literature based on its relevance to the focus of the study. The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis and content analysis. Content analysis was employed to examine the meanings, arguments, and normative principles contained in the selected Qur'anic verses, hadith, and scholarly works. The analysis particularly focuses on examining how excessive veneration may develop into practices associated with *shirk*. Several studies on the purification of *tawḥīd* also regard excessive veneration of religious figures or the graves of righteous individuals as an issue that requires critical examination in relation to the boundary between legitimate veneration and deviations in *ʿaqīdah* (Alfadian S Geo, n.d.).

Furthermore, this study identifies actions that may need to be prevented through the application of *sadd al-dharīʿah*and formulates criteria for distinguishing legitimate veneration (*taʿẓīm* mashrūʿ) from prohibited religious excess (*ghuluw muḥarram*). Discussions concerning the theological boundaries in understanding the attributes of Allah are also used as a supporting perspective to explain the importance of exercising caution toward forms of veneration that exceed normative boundaries (Istiqamah, 2020). The findings are then synthesized to formulate *wasaṭiyyah* as a protective framework that maintains a balance between legitimate veneration and religious excess. Within the Qur'anic normative framework, this principle of balance is consistent with the concept of the middle nation (*ummatan wasaṭan*) (Qur'an, Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]:143). Thus, *wasaṭiyyah* is positioned not as a rejection of veneration, but as a regulating principle that ensures veneration remains within the boundaries of *tawḥīd* and Islamic law.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sadd al-Dharīah and the Stages from Ghuluw to Shirk

Sadd al-dharīʿah—the principle of blocking a permissible means when it is likely to lead to a prohibited result or harm (mafsadah)—has been widely applied in Islamic jurisprudence to prevent harm before it occurs Nurhikmah et al., "Implementation of Sadd Al-Dhari'ah in Preventing Detrimental Practices by Debt Collectors towards Customers in Indonesia," 2025; Sanata, "Urgensi Sadd Adz-Dzari'ah Dalam Mengatasi Masalah Perekonomian Indonesia.". While some scholars have debated its status as an independent legal proof (Na'mah, 2015), its preventive logic is particularly relevant for analysing how devotional practices may gradually shift from emotional attachment to acts of worship directed to other than Allah. Unlike maqāṣid al-sharīʿah, which provides general objectives, sadd al-dharīʿah

offers an operational mechanism for identifying and blocking specific pathways before they culminate in shirk.

The first stage, emotional attachment, refers to an intense admiration for a prophet, scholar, saint, or righteous person. Islamic law permits love and respect for such figures, provided it remains within the boundaries established by the Qur'an and Sunnah Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl al-Sharīʿah.* The risk emerges when this admiration is no longer regulated by religious evidence and begins to attribute to a created being powers that exceed normal human capacity, such as the ability to independently know the unseen or control benefit and harm. This stage is analytically distinguishable from mere respect because it involves a shift in the believer's internal orientation, even if no outward act of worship has yet occurred.

The second stage, excessive veneration (ghuluw), occurs when admiration translates into beliefs or practices that exceed the boundaries of the Sharīʿah. This may include exaggerating praise beyond what the Prophet himself approved, believing that a created being can independently provide protection or benefit, or treating a grave as a locus of special religious power. The Prophet explicitly prohibited excessive praise of himself, instructing Muslims to describe him as "the servant of Allah and His Messenger" Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī.*, Ḥadīth No. 3445). This prohibition establishes a clear principle: veneration of the Prophet must not cross into attribution of divine qualities, as doing so would compromise the exclusivity of tawḥīd.

The third stage, ritualization, occurs when emotional attachment is expressed through repeated religious acts, such as making special supplications at graves, seeking blessings from the deceased, or performing rituals believed to bring spiritual protection. Ibn Taymiyyah argues that excessive veneration of righteous people may develop into grave-centred practices and eventually into acts of worship directed to created beings Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtiḍāʾ Al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm Li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm (N. Ibn ʻA. al-ʻAql, Ed.)*. He cites the classical report concerning the people of Noah, which describes a progression from remembering righteous persons to making images of them and later worshipping them. This report, while historical, illustrates a recurring pattern: ritualization serves as a bridge between internal veneration and external acts of worship, making it a critical point for preventive intervention.

The final stage, shirk, occurs when worship is directed to other than Allah, whether through supplication, seeking supernatural help, making vows, or believing that a created being independently controls benefit and harm. Ibn al-Qayyim explains that excessive veneration of created beings is among the principal causes through which people fall into idolatry Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Iʿlām Al-Muwaqqiʿīn ʿan Rabb al-ʿālamīn.* This progression underscores the preventive logic of sadd al-dharīʿah: rather than waiting for shirk to occur, the principle intervenes at earlier stages by blocking practices that are likely to lead to it. However, it is important to note that this framework is not a substitute for wasaṭiyyah, which regulates the believer's internal orientation before excess occurs. Together, sadd al-dharīʿah and wasaṭiyyah provide complementary mechanisms for preserving tawḥīd, though their application may vary across different cultural and jurisprudential contexts.

Criteria for Legitimate and Excessive Veneration

Drawing on the framework of sadd al-dharīʿah and the objectives of wasaṭiyyah, this study proposes three criteria for distinguishing legitimate veneration (taʿẓīm mashrūʿ) from prohibited excess (ghuluw muḥarram): the object of veneration, the form of veneration, and the belief underlying the act. While these criteria are not exhaustive, they provide an operational framework for assessing practices that may fall along the continuum between respect and excess.

The first criterion concerns the object of veneration. Islamic law permits respect for prophets, scholars, parents, teachers, and righteous individuals because of their knowledge, piety, and service to the community Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl al-Sharīʿah.* However, ultimate reverence and all forms of worship belong exclusively to Allah. Respect for a person becomes problematic when it places that person at the level of divinity, such as by attributing to them the power to independently answer prayers or control benefit and harm. This criterion therefore distinguishes between honouring a person as a model of piety and treating them as an object of worship.

The second criterion concerns the form of veneration. Legitimate forms include learning from scholars, praying for deceased Muslims, following authentic Prophetic teachings, and remembering the good example of righteous people Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtiḍāʾ Al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm Li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm (N. Ibn ʻA. al-ʻAql, Ed.).* In contrast, prohibited forms include supplicating to the deceased, seeking supernatural assistance from them, making vows to them, or treating their graves as places of worship. The Prophet explicitly warned against taking graves as places of worship, stating: "Do not make my grave a place of celebration, and do not make your houses graves" Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī.* Ḥadīth No. 1185; Ibn al-Ḥajjāj., *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (M. F. ʻAbd al-Bāqī, Ed.).* Ḥadīth No. 974). This prohibition establishes a clear boundary: while visiting graves for remembrance is permitted, treating them as loci of worship is not.

The third criterion concerns the belief underlying the act. An act becomes theologically dangerous when it is based on the belief that a prophet, saint, scholar, or deceased person independently knows the unseen, answers prayers, removes hardship, or controls benefit and harm. Such beliefs contradict the exclusive divine authority of Allah, as affirmed in the Qur'anic verse: "And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them except Him" (Qur'an 6:59). Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes that the prohibition of excessive veneration protects believers from directing religious devotion to created beings, thereby preserving the purity of tawḥīd Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtiḍāʾ Al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm Li-Mukhālafat Aṣḥāb al-Jaḥīm (N. Ibn ʻA. al-ʻAql, Ed.).* This criterion is particularly important because it addresses the internal dimension of belief, which may not always be visible in outward practices.

Wasatiyyah as a Framework for Preserving Tawhid

Wasaṭiyyah, often translated as moderation or balance, is a Qur'anic principle that governs religious belief and practice. It rejects two opposite extremes: negligence in honouring the Prophet and righteous people, and exaggeration that attributes to them rights belonging exclusively to Allah Kamali, *The Middle Path of*

Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah. This balance is consistent with the Qur'anic prohibition of excess in religion: "O People of the Book! Do not go to extremes in your religion" (Qur'an 4:171; 5:77). Unlike sadd al-dharīʿah, which operates as a preventive legal mechanism, wasaṭiyyah functions as an internal ethical guide that regulates the believer's orientation before excess occurs.

In the context of tawḥīd, wasaṭiyyah requires Muslims to love the Prophet, respect scholars, and honour righteous people without directing worship to them. It also requires believers to worship Allah sincerely without imposing extreme practices that contradict the Prophetic model. The Prophet rejected those who wished to fast continuously, pray all night without rest, or avoid marriage for the sake of worship, stating: "Do not impose austerities on yourselves, for Allah will impose them on you" Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Bukhārī.* Ḥadīth No. 6463; Ibn al-Ḥajjāj., *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (M. F. 'Abd al-Bāqī, Ed.).* Ḥadīth No. 2828). These criteria align with the three dimensions of veneration discussed in section 3.2: object, form, and belief. Wasaṭiyyah ensures that each dimension remains within the boundaries of tawḥīd.

Thus, wasaṭiyyah and sadd al-dharīʿah function as complementary mechanisms for preserving tawḥīd. Wasaṭiyyah operates as an internal ethical guide that regulates attitudes before excess occurs, while sadd al-dharīʿah operates as a preventive legal framework that blocks practices likely to lead to harmful theological consequences. Together, they preserve ḥifẓ al-dīn, or the protection of religion, which al-Shāṭibī identifies as one of the essential objectives of the Sharīʿah Al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fī Uṣūl al-Sharīʿah.*

The New Narrative: From Stages to Criteria to Protection

The findings of this study offer a new narrative that reframes the perennial challenge of excessive veneration in Muslim societies. This narrative is threefold.

First, it reframes ghuluw not as a static category but as a dynamic process with identifiable stages—emotional attachment, excessive veneration, ritualization, and shirk. Each stage presents a distinct point of intervention for sadd al-dharīʿah, enabling jurists, educators, and policymakers to act before the situation escalates. This contrasts with previous studies, which have tended to treat ghuluw as a monolithic phenomenon rather than a process with internal dynamics Mifdalulkiram et al., *The Danger of Ghuluw: When Excessive Veneration of The Righteous Becomes a Path To Polytheism*; Harits et al., "A Tawhid Analysis Of Worshiping Created Beings In Shaykh Ibn Baz's View.".

Second, it moves beyond the binary of "legitimate" versus "prohibited" veneration by proposing three operational criteria—object, form, and belief—that can be applied across different objects of veneration. This addresses a significant gap in the literature, as previous studies have not derived such criteria systematically. For example, Ridho et al. (2026) analyse grave veneration from a Salafi perspective, but they do not provide criteria that can be generalised to other objects of veneration Ridho et al., "The Concept of Shirk in Tafsir and Hadith: A Salafi Critical Analysis of the Practice of Visiting the Graves of Pious Figures in Muslim Society.". Fasya et al. (2025) explore the boundaries of shirk in istighāthah, but they do not extend their analysis to other practices Fasya et al., *A Classical Study on Istighāthah and the*

Boundaries of Shirk in Islamic Creed. By contrast, the present study offers a framework that is both specific enough to be operational and general enough to be applied across contexts.

Third, it positions wasaṭiyyah not merely as a virtue but as a protective framework that works in tandem with sadd al-dharīʿah. While Kamali, *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah*. provides a comprehensive account of wasaṭiyyah as a Qur'anic principle, he does not connect it explicitly to the preventive logic of sadd al-dharīʿah. The present study fills this gap by showing how the two mechanisms complement each other: wasaṭiyyah regulates the believer's internal orientation before excess occurs, while sadd al-dharīʿah blocks practices that are likely to lead to harmful consequences. Together, they offer a comprehensive framework for preserving tawḥīd.

Implications for Local Contexts: The Case of Southeast Asia

These findings have particular relevance for Southeast Asia, where practices of veneration often intersect with local tradition. In Indonesia, for example, the ziarah to the tombs of the Wali Songo is a widespread practice that carries deep cultural significance. While the practice is often framed as a form of reverence for the saints, it has sometimes been criticised for crossing into excessive veneration Yusoff et al., "The Concept of Ghulūw in Islam: An Analysis on Its Manifestations and Causes in The Modern World.". Similarly, in Malaysia, the veneration of habib lineages and the use of amulets have raised questions about the boundary between legitimate respect and prohibited excess.

The framework proposed in this study offers a way to analyse these practices without dismissing them as merely syncretic or deviant. By applying the three criteria—object, form, and belief—scholars and jurists can assess whether a particular practice remains within the boundaries of legitimate veneration or whether it has crossed into prohibited excess. For example, visiting the tomb of a wali for the purpose of remembrance and supplication to Allah is permitted; however, supplicating to the wali himself, believing that he independently controls benefit and harm, is prohibited. This framework thus provides a nuanced approach that respects local traditions while safeguarding the purity of tawḥīd.

Moreover, the framework has implications for Islamic education in Southeast Asia. Educators can use the three criteria to teach students how to distinguish between legitimate and excessive veneration, thereby fostering a balanced understanding of tawhīd. This is particularly important in a region where students are exposed to a wide range of practices, some of which may be theologically problematic.

Limitations, Future Research, and Concluding Part

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it does not undertake a comprehensive comparative analysis across all four Sunni madhāhib, as the focus is primarily on the Ḥanbalī and Shāfiʿī traditions. This means that the proposed framework may require further refinement before it can be applied to other jurisprudential contexts. Second, the study relies on written sources and

does not include empirical validation of the proposed criteria through fieldwork. While the framework is grounded in Islamic texts and jurisprudence, it has not been tested in specific Muslim communities. Third, while the study draws on contemporary scholarship, it does not claim to exhaust the vast literature on sadd al-dharīʿah and ghuluw. Further research may uncover additional dimensions that are not addressed here.

These limitations suggest that the findings should be regarded as a conceptual framework for further refinement and empirical testing. Future research could empirically test the proposed criteria in specific Muslim communities, examining how believers themselves distinguish between legitimate veneration and prohibited excess in practice. Such research could combine textual analysis with ethnographic methods, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how the framework operates in real-life contexts. Additionally, future studies could extend the framework to other jurisprudential traditions, examining whether the criteria are applicable across different madhāhib.

CONCLUSION

This study has proposed a systematic framework for shielding tawḥīd from the paths leading to shirk through ghuluw. By applying sadd al-dharīʿah as a principal analytical lens, the study has identified four stages of ghuluw—emotional attachment, excessive veneration, ritualization, and shirk—and has proposed three operational criteria—object, form, and belief—for distinguishing legitimate veneration from prohibited excess. Furthermore, the study has positioned wasaṭiyyah as a complementary protective framework that regulates the believer's internal orientation before excess occurs. Together, these contributions offer a new narrative that reframes ghuluw as a dynamic process, moves beyond the binary of legitimate versus prohibited veneration, and positions wasaṭiyyah as a protective framework. The study thus contributes to the broader discourse on tawḥīd and shirk, offering a framework that is both textually grounded and jurisprudentially operational. It is hoped that this framework will be of benefit to scholars, jurists, educators, and policymakers in their efforts to preserve the purity of tawḥīd in contemporary Muslim societies.

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