

## BETWEEN WORK AND SPIRITUALITY Exploring Indonesian Female Migrant Workers' Engagement with Islamic Study Sessions in Taiwan

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**Abstract:** This study delves into the spiritual lives of Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan. It uncovers how these workers actively engage in *pengajian* (Islamic study sessions) to address spiritual needs. The research question in this study is how do *pengajian* contribute to fulfilling spiritual needs, strengthening communication networks, and forming national identity for Indonesian women migrant workers in Taiwan. This research uses a qualitative approach with an online data collection method, involving in-depth interviews with the management of the *pengajian* and participatory observation of its activities of Indonesian women migrant workers in Taiwan. The research reveals that these gatherings facilitate everyday Islamic jurisprudence studies, sufism moral introspection, Quranic learning, and salawat recitations. Additionally, these sessions foster robust communication networks among workers, enhancing their information exchange, relationships, and discussions. In uncertain conditions, these gatherings provide ideological reinforcement, social engagement, and a sense of national identity. The study suggests potential future research avenues in education and political ideology of these migrant workers.

**Keywords:** Female migrant workers, *pengajian*, religious engagement, Taiwan.

### Introduction

The role of Indonesian migrant workers transcends mere economic sustenance, encompassing the development of spiritual understanding. Although the number of women workers in Indonesia

is high thanks to industrialization,<sup>1</sup> the interest to work overseas among Indonesian women remains sky rocketing. Female migrant workers, in particular, necessitate a robust grounding in religious knowledge as a cornerstone for spiritual fortitude amidst the plethora of adversities encountered overseas. The impact of Indonesian female migrant workers extends beyond personal benefits to communal and national realms, as substantiated by existing data. Although elsewhere people already speak about rights of gig workers,<sup>2</sup> less skilled workers issues such as migrant workers are still on the table.

Discourse on diverse social media platforms concerning significant data from the Crisis Center of the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency (Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia or BP2MI) in 2022 underscores a myriad of challenges faced between 2019–2021. These challenges include, but are not limited to, unpaid wages, thwarted departures, human trafficking, contractual violations, employer-inflicted violence, mental health crises, and deceptive employment opportunities.<sup>3</sup> The data further delineates the progressively dire circumstances of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, especially those in domestic caregiving roles,<sup>4</sup> where stagnant wages and rampant exploitation are prevalent.<sup>5</sup> Additional concerns entail unpaid salaries, occupational accidents, repatriation, sexual harassment, physical abuse, and the phenomena of illegal or absconding Indonesian migrant workers.<sup>6</sup> Such scenarios underscore

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<sup>1</sup> Nur Musyafa'ah et al., "The Role of Women Workers in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, in Meeting Families' Needs During the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Maqāṣid Shari'ah Perspective," *Al-Ihkam: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 17 (2022): pp. 60–90, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-ihkam.v17i1.5509>.

<sup>2</sup> Rofi Aulia Rahman, Jozef Hajdu, and Valentino Nathanael, "Digital Labour Platformer's Legal Status and Decent Working Conditions: European Union and Indonesian Perspective," *Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Konstitusi*, (2024), pp. 157–75, <https://doi.org/10.24090/volksgeist.v7i1.10366>.

<sup>3</sup> Agustina Purwanti, "Tantangan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia," *www.kompas.id*, January 24, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> See Sri Suhandjati & Hamdan Hadi Kusuma, "Reinterpretation of Women's Domestic Roles: Saleh Darat's Thought on Strengthening Women's Roles in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2018.12.2.195-218>.

<sup>5</sup> Rio Tuasikal, "TKW Di Taiwan Makin Terjepit: 6 Tahun Gaji Tak Naik Dan Dieksploitasi Majikan," *www.voaindonesia.com*, May 21, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Lidya Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Iksan, Suci Muqodimatul Jannah, Vreslisawati Sagala, "Solving the Problem of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan: An Analysis

the multifaceted complexities confronting Indonesian female migrant workers<sup>7</sup> in Taiwan, hence underscoring the indispensability of Islamic study sessions, or *pengajian*, for spiritual fortification.

Hitherto, scholarly discourse on female migrant workers has predominantly orbited around three focal themes. Firstly, investigations into external challenges faced by workers, encompassing bilateral relations, employer negligence in salary and welfare matters, work stress,<sup>8</sup> and the economic landscape of Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, explorations into the internal dilemmas of migrant workers, including health issues, sexual harassment,<sup>10</sup> and the historical context of migration to Taiwan.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless,<sup>12</sup> these studies have yet to delve into the engagement of female migrant workers in addressing their spiritual void.<sup>13</sup>

This study intended to address religious dimensions in the lives of Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan, particularly in the context of their participation in Islamic study groups. This study posits that the experience of these migrant workers transcends mere pragmatic-materialistic or economic motivations, encompassing the

of Indonesian Government Response,” *Indonesian Scholars Scientific Summit Taiwan Proceeding* 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.52162/3.2021103>.

<sup>7</sup> On women working, see Ahmad Muhtadi Anshor, “The Making Of Single Parent Resilience In Post-Covid-19 Pandemic In Indonesia: A Maqashid Al-Syar’ah Approach,” *Episteme: Jurnal Pengembangan Ilmu Keislaman* 18, 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.21274/epis.2023.18.1.27-49>.

<sup>8</sup> Faruk Sentürk and Selin Isikan, “Islamic Faith as A Source of Coping with Work Stress,” *Al-Jami’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62 (2024): 65–90, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.621.65-90>.

<sup>9</sup> Ali Maksun, Ching-lung Tsay, & Ali Muhammad, “Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan: The State Dilemma and People’s Realities,” *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 24, 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.51303>.

<sup>10</sup> Paulus Rudolf Yuniarto, “Indonesian Migration Industry In Taiwan: Some Socio-Economic Implications And Improvement Challenges,” *Jurnal Kajian Wilayah* 6, 1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.14203/jkw.v6i1.67>.

<sup>11</sup> Yuherina Gusman, “The Experience of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan during Covid-19 Pandemic: A ‘Right-Based’ Analysis,” *Al Daulab : Jurnal Hukum Pidana Dan Ketatanegaraan* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.24252/ad.v10i1.21080>.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent Didiek Wiet Aryanto & Thomas Budi Santoso, “The Indonesian Overseas Migrant Workers and the Role of E-Counseling in Taiwan,” *International Journal of Applied Behavioral Economics* 2, 1 (2013).

<sup>13</sup> Petra Melchert, “Indonesian Migrants in Taiwan Religion and Life-Styles,” *Masterarbeit Am Institut Für Ethnologie Der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Munster*, 2015.

fulfillment of spiritual needs during their leisure time. The engagement of these workers in *pengajian*, as a means to utilize their free time, presents a complex array of dynamics. Aligned with this purpose, the paper seeks to answer three pivotal questions, each corresponding to a specific research goal. Firstly, it explores how Indonesian female migrant workers address their spiritual emptiness. Secondly, it examines the role of *pengajian* in fostering camaraderie and social bonds. Thirdly, it investigates the ways in which these migrant workers seek and find support to navigate the uncertainties of their lives in a foreign land. This inquiry aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of their experiences, emphasizing the significance of spiritual and communal aspects in their lives.

This study was conducted in various regions of Taiwan, selected due to the country's popularity among Indonesian migrant workers, both male and female. Taiwan's appeal lies in its potential for higher earnings, contributing to improved welfare levels. The perception of Taiwan as a materially affluent and culturally diverse nation makes it an attractive destination for workers. The research employs a qualitative-descriptive-analytical approach to examine the phenomenon of Indonesian female migrant workers, particularly focusing on their involvement in Islamic study sessions. The study utilizes case studies to provide insightful information and potential solutions to prevalent issues. The secular nature of Taiwan, which witness considerable religious pluralism,<sup>14</sup> presents unique challenges for migrant workers, especially Muslims, who may find it difficult to fulfill their private-transcendent needs due to limited religious facilities and support. This context offers a compelling case for detailed examination.

Data for this research was primarily sourced from chairpersons, key figures, and administrators of Islamic study groups (*majelis taklim*) in Taiwan, identified as critical to the study. Five Islamic study groups were selected based on their management structure, organizational setup, and programmatic offerings. These include Majelis Taklim Darul Hikmah On Air, Darul Ishlah Nusantara (DINUS), the Indonesian Muslim Citizens in Taiwan Association (Ikatan Warga Muslim Indonesia Taiwan or IWAMIT) On Air, Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air, and Majelis Taklim Shalawat Nariyah. Selection criteria encompassed representativeness, longevity, congregation size,

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<sup>14</sup> A Laliberté, "Taiwan's Covenantal Pluralism," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 19, 1 (2021): pp. 42–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1874144>.

and the predominance of female migrants in their management and activities. Additional data was gathered from various news sources, social media, and publications discussing Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, focusing on the history, membership, vision, mission, activities, and developmental dynamics of the groups.

Data collection involved conducting online interviews using various platforms such as WhatsApp, video calls, LINE, Facebook, and others. A semi-structured interview format was employed, with questions derived from the central research theme of Indonesian female migrant worker involvement in *pengajian*. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and organized according to research requirements. The scheduling of interviews was coordinated based on the availability of sources, often conducted at night to accommodate their free time. Following data collection, the next step involved sorting the data for in-depth analysis and conclusion formulation. The research adopted an inductive analytical approach, constructing various hypotheses from the field data. The findings were then contextualized with relevant literature to derive the research results and conclusions.

### Religious Engagement

Religion holds a pivotal role in shaping human life towards collective well-being.<sup>15</sup> The essence of being religious encapsulates the endeavor to assimilate and actualize religious doctrines in every facet of life, fostering harmony among individuals, the environment, and the divine.<sup>16</sup> Religious engagement encompasses the active participation of individuals or communities in a spectrum of religious practices, beliefs, and rituals.<sup>17</sup> This encompasses worship, prayer, the study of holy scriptures, community service, and adherence to religiously-informed

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<sup>15</sup> Agus Ahmad Safei, Mukti Ali, & Emma Himayaturohmah, "Dealing with Islamophobia: Expanding Religious Engagement to Civic Engagement among the Indonesian Muslim Community in Australia," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 78, 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7353>.

<sup>16</sup> Moch Fakhruroji, "Digitalizing Islamic Lectures: Islamic Apps and Religious Engagement in Contemporary Indonesia," *Contemporary Islam* 13 (2019): pp. 201–215, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-018-0427-9>.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Mandaville, "Right-Sizing Religion and Religious Engagement in Diplomacy and Development," *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 19, 1 (2021): pp. 92–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2021.1983345>.

principles, morals, and ethics.<sup>18</sup> Various religions adopt distinctive approaches to faith and spirituality, often involving the interpretation of sacred texts like the Qur'an, Bible, Psalms, and the Vedas,<sup>19</sup> aiding in deepening the adherents' religious conviction and understanding.<sup>20</sup>

Additional facets of religious engagement include participation in religious gatherings, observance of significant religious events like Isra Mi'raj, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha in Islam,<sup>21</sup> all contributing to a connection with the divine and spiritual fulfillment.<sup>22</sup> Numerous religious communities offer educational initiatives for all ages, imparting knowledge on the history, doctrine, and traditions of their respective faiths.<sup>23</sup> This aspect of religious involvement is also pertinent to female migrant workers.<sup>24</sup> These workers partake in formal religious studies, engaging in educational pursuits and skill development in their host countries, which may include pursuing academic qualifications aligned with their interests and abilities.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Hin Wah Chris Cheung, Chi-Kin John Lee, Kerry John Kennedy, & Xiaoxue Kuang "Adolescent Religious Engagement and Democracy: A Comparison of Student Attitudes in Hong Kong and South Korea," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 52, 5 (2022): pp. 768–803, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1834837>.

<sup>19</sup> Chris Hin Wah Cheung, Kerry J. Kennedy, Chi Hung Leung, & Ming Tak Hue, "Eligious Engagement and Attitudes to the Role of Religion in Society: Their Effect on Civic and Social Values in an Asian Context," *British Journal of Religious Education* 40, 2 (2018): pp. 158–168, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2016.1256269>.

<sup>20</sup> Em Rabelais, Nora L Jones, Connie M Ulrich, & Janet A Deatrck, "Meaning Making and Religious Engagement Among Survivors of Childhood Brain Tumors and Their Caregivers," *Oncology Nursing Forum* 46, 2 (2019): pp. 170–184, <https://doi.org/10.1188/19.ONF>.

<sup>21</sup> Moch Fakhruroji, "Digitalizing Islamic Lectures: Islamic Apps and Religious Engagement in Contemporary Indonesia."

<sup>22</sup> Mahmoud Yasin, Lucia Porcu, & Francisco Liébana-Cabanillas, "Looking into the Islamic Banking Sector in Palestine: Do Religious Values Influence Active Social Media Engagement Behavior?," *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 12, 9 (2020): pp. 1801–1819, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-10-2019-0201>.

<sup>23</sup> Gulnaz Anjum, "Women's Activism in Pakistan: Role of Religious Nationalism and Feminist Ideology among Self-Identified Conservatives and Liberals," *Open Cultural Studies* 4, 1 (2020): pp. 36–49, <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2020-0004>.

<sup>24</sup> Hodan Ahmed Mohamed, "Muslim Women on the Margin: On Whose Authority Does Islamic Knowledge Rest," *Religions* 13, 9 (2022), p. 817, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090817>.

<sup>25</sup> Yeni Huriani & Nablur Rahman Annibras, "Decision Making Process of Women Migrant Workers in West Java: The Intertwine of Religion, Culture, and Social

Consequently, religious engagement serves as a conduit for spiritual growth, solace, and communal support, with its extent and form being influenced by cultural, social, and individual determinants.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Pengajian* (Islamic Study Sessions)**

The concept of *pengajian*, while contextually varied, predominantly refers in Indonesia to communal gatherings aimed at the study of religion, particularly Islam.<sup>27</sup> while *pengajian* is more common term in Java, it is called as *majlis taklim* elsewhere in Indonesia,<sup>28</sup> which also has significant role in islamization past and present.<sup>29</sup> These sessions are dedicated to deepening the understanding and practice of Islam. Typically, Islamic study groups convene in homes, mosques, musalla, or other designated locations, focusing on lectures, the study of the Quran, *fiqh*, ethics, and other religious subjects.<sup>30</sup> During Dutch colonialism, it also became center for resistance.<sup>31</sup> while formal Islamic education encompasses instructional activities within academic institutions such as schools, *pesantren*,<sup>32</sup> colleges, and universities,<sup>33</sup>

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Reality,” *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama Dan Sosial Budaya* 5, 1 (2020): pp. 58–66, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jw.v5i1.8068>.

<sup>26</sup> Nava Nuraniyah, “Not Just Brainwashed: Understanding the Radicalization of Indonesian Female Supporters of the Islamic State,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30, 6 (2018): pp. 890–910, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1481269>.

<sup>27</sup> Khalid M.O. Nahar, Ra’ed M. Al-Khatib, Moy’awiah A. Al-Shannaq, & Malek M. Barhoush, “An Efficient Holy Quran Recitation Recognizer Based on SVM Learning Model,” *Jordanian Journal of Computers and Information Technology* 6, 4 (2020): pp. 392–414, <https://doi.org/10.5455/jjcit.71-1593380662>.

<sup>28</sup> Nisaul Fadillah, “Women’s Majelis Taklim and the Gradual Move Toward Gender Equality,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 17, 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2023-17.1.100-123>.

<sup>29</sup> Hilman Latief and Abd Madjid, “Majlis Taklim and The Path Of Women’s Islamization In Indonesia,” *The Muslim World* 112 (2022): pp. 457–72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/muwo.12449>.

<sup>30</sup> T. N. Diyana, Sutopo, & Sunaryono, “The Effectiveness of Web-Based Recitation Program on Improving Students’ Conceptual Understanding in Fluid Mechanics,” *Jurnal Pendidikan IPA Indonesia* 9, 2 (2020): pp. 219–230, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jpii.v9i2.24043>.

<sup>31</sup> Ja’Far Ja’far et al., “Discovering the Legacy of Mandailing Ulama: Education, Intellectuals, and Politics in North Sumatra in the Early 20th Century,” *Ulumuna* 26 (2022): pp. 296–336, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v26i2.502>.

<sup>32</sup> Imam Mujahid, “Islamic Orthodoxy-Based Character Education: Creating Moderate Muslim in a Modern Pesantren in Indonesia,” *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11 (2021): pp. 185–212, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.185-212>.

Muslims from many persuasions uses *pengajian* in spreading Islam.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, *pengajian* may extend to encompass discussions on a broad range of topics including science, culture, and the arts, thereby serving as a medium for enhancing societal knowledge and understanding.<sup>35</sup>

*Pengajian* can attract a diverse range of participants, including female migrant workers who are in pursuit of both social and spiritual support within their host countries. The involvement of these migrant women in Islamic study groups is complex and context-dependent. These sessions, whether formal or informal, serve as platforms for these workers to gain knowledge, receive social support, and maintain their cultural and religious connections during their time abroad.<sup>36</sup> In the countries where they reside, female migrant workers frequently form strong religious communities. Their active participation in religious teachings, lectures, or group studies not only bolsters their faith but also helps in preserving their cultural and religious identities.<sup>37</sup> These gatherings, therefore, offer pivotal opportunities for these women to forge connections with fellow female migrant workers, establish social networks, and acquire the necessary support to adeptly handle the complexities of living in a foreign land.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Musthika W. Mashitah & Kumoro A. Lenggono, "Quran Recitation Therapy Reduces the Depression Levels of Hemodialysis Patients," *International Journal of Research in Medical Sciences* 8, 6 (2020): pp. 2222–2227, <https://doi.org/10.18203/2320-6012.ijrms20202271>.

<sup>34</sup> Jamhari Makruf and Saifudin Asrori, "In the Making of Salafi-Based Islamic Schools in Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 60, 1 (2022).

<sup>35</sup> Eman Ghanem & Nubli M Wahab, "The Effect of Recitation Quran on the Human Emotions," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 7, 5 (2018): pp. 48–68, <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v8-i2/3852>.

<sup>36</sup> Ali Maksum, Ching-lung Tsay, & Ali Muhammad, "Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan: The State Dilemma and People's Realities," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik* 24, 1 (2021), p. 80, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.51303>.

<sup>37</sup> Nicole Constable, "Telling Tales of Migrant Workers in Hong Kong: Transformations of Faith, Life Scripts, and Activism," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 11, 3–4 (2010): pp. 311–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2010.513399>.

<sup>38</sup> Hilman Latief, "Addressing Unfortunate Wayfarer: Islamic Philanthropy and Indonesian Migrant Workers in Hong Kong," *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 10, 2 (2017): pp. 237–255, <https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-2017.2-7>.

## Female Migrant Workers

Female migrant workers are women who relocate from their native countries to pursue employment or economic opportunities abroad,<sup>39</sup> as well as escape from conflicts, or political instability in their homelands.<sup>40</sup> These workers typically journey considerable distances and may reside in foreign countries for extended durations. Within the migrant workforce, women confront unique challenges and heightened risks compared to their male counterparts.<sup>41</sup> Female migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to economic exploitation, often working under suboptimal conditions with inadequate wages and insufficient legal protection.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, they frequently grapple with psychological difficulties and social isolation due to their separation from families and familiar environments. Consequently, many seek communities that offer support and a sense of belonging while living abroad.<sup>43</sup>

Religious communities often serve as the initial refuge for female migrant workers, offering an environment conducive to integration and acceptance.<sup>44</sup> These communities may also provide various services and assistance, including legal aid, healthcare, and employment

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<sup>39</sup> Wee Chan Au, Uracha Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, Yan Soon Tan, & Pervaiz K. Ahmed, "The Work-Life Experiences of an Invisible Workforce: The Case of Live-in Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Malaysia," *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* 39, 5 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-02-2019-0059>.

<sup>40</sup> Bo Yang & Daniel Zhang Qu, "Rural to Urban Migrant Workers in China: Challenges of Risks and Rights," *Asian Education and Development Studies* 10, 1 (2020): pp. 5–15, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-02-2019-0042>.

<sup>41</sup> Anifatul Hanim, A. Zainuri, & S. Sudaryanto, "Rationality of Gender Equality of Indonesian Women Migrant Worker," *International Journal of Scientific and Technology Research* 8, 9 (2019): pp. 1238–1242.

<sup>42</sup> Anam Huda, "The Identity of Javanese Women (The Study of Phenomenology Toward Indonesian Migrant Women Workers)," *JARES (Journal of Academic Research and Sciences)* 1, 1 (2016): pp. 61–72, <https://doi.org/10.35457/jares.v1i1.506>.

<sup>43</sup> Helen J Rogers, Lily Hogan, Dominiek Coates, Caroline S E Homer, & Amanda Henry, "Cross Cultural Workers for Women and Families from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds: A Mixed-Methods Study of Service Providers Perceptions," *BMC Women's Health* 21 (2021), p. 222, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-021-01368-4>.

<sup>44</sup> L. Lutfiyah, Nurdien Harry Kistanto, & Muhammad Akmaluddin, "Women Migrant Workers in Fiqh Perspectives," *SAWWA: Jurnal Studi Gender* 15, 1 (2020): pp. 17–36, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v15i1.556>.

guidance.<sup>45</sup> For those practicing specific religions, religious groups offer a sanctuary for worship and spiritual fortification, providing emotional and mental support amidst the challenges encountered in a new country.<sup>46</sup> Frequently, these communities organize religious and social events, such as group prayers, recitations, religious celebrations, or charity activities, facilitating opportunities for newcomers to forge connections and expand their networks.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, each migrant woman, with her unique preferences and needs, seeks out a community that aligns with her identity and interests.

### Filling Spiritual Emptiness in Leisure Time

This study reveals that the involvement of female migrant workers in *pengajian* or Islamic study sessions is motivated not only by the desire to fill a spiritual void but also to strengthen social bonds among these workers in unstable and complex situations. This context is illustrated through three findings below.

As for the need to fill spiritual emptiness during their leisure time, the motives of female migrant workers can be seen through the forms of their involvement in *pengajian* in Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Forms of filling spiritual emptiness

Form	Narrative
1 Everyday- <i>fiqh</i> understanding	1 “The <i>ustadz</i> (teacher) answered my question about how to purify myself after bathing my employer’s dog every day. He said, ‘Choose a <i>fiqh</i> school that allows dog-keeping or states that dogs are not impure.’” (Mrs. Imro, Chairwoman of IWAMIT)
	2 “Usually, from 05:00-07:00 AM, it starts with

<sup>45</sup> Jonas Nakonz & Angela Wai Yan Shik, “And All Your Problems Are Gone: Religious Coping Strategies among Philippine Migrant Workers in Hong Kong,” *Mental Health, Religion and Culture* 12, 1 (2009): pp. 25–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670802105252>.

<sup>46</sup> Inayah Rohmaniyah, Agus Indiyanto, Zainuddin Prasajo, & Julaekkah Julaekkah, “Redefining Status through Burqa: Religious Transformation and Body Politics of Indonesia’s Woman Migrant Workers,” *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 78, 4 (2022), p. 7270, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7270>.

<sup>47</sup> Rui Yuan, “Incorporating Life Skills Education in Vocational Training: Toward Empowerment-Based Skills Advancement for Young Women Migrant Workers in China,” *Journal of Social Service Research* 47, 6 (2021): pp. 860–871, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2021.1941502>.

Form	Narrative
	the <i>asmaul husna dbiker</i> , followed by learning sessions, including studies of texts [like] <i>Qurratul 'Uyun, Al Barzanji, Safinatun Najah, tausiah</i> (moral messages), and others.” (Mrs. Diyyan, advisor at Majelis Taklim Darul Hikmah On Air)
2 Understanding of ethics and <i>tasawwuf</i>	<p>1 “Congregants are [taught to be] able to read the Qur'an correctly to improve their prayer recitations over time, accompanied by an understanding of <i>fiqh</i> and <i>tasawwuf</i>, aiming for the perfection of worship towards becoming devout believers” (Mr. Bambang, Founder of Majelis Ta'lim Yasin Taipei (MTYT))</p> <p>2 “We find many answers about how to enhance our faith and interact with others, especially in Taiwan, a non-Muslim majority country. We gain this understanding from our sessions with the <i>ustadz/ustadzah</i>.” (Mr. Diyyan, advisor at Majelis Taklim Darul Hikmah On Air)</p>
3 Reading the Qur'an and reciting <i>salawat</i>	<p>1 “<i>Gus Aun</i> (KH. Aunullah A'la Al Habib, Lc) stated: ‘As Muslims, we must adhere to the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. The Prophet left nothing to his <i>ummah</i> but these two.’” (Mrs. Imro, Chairperson of IWAMIT)</p> <p>2 “<i>Habib Syech Abdul Qodir Assegaf, Gus Sonhaji Nawal Karim, Gus Ali Gondrong Mafja Sholawat, K.H. Ma'ruf Islamudin and Wandra Restusiyana</i> emphasize that ‘to be interceded by the Prophet, one must often recite <i>salawat</i>. <i>Salawat</i> brings many blessings in life.’” (Mrs. Indah, administrator at Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air)</p>

The above data highlights the drive of Indonesian female migrant workers in addressing the spiritual vacuum within Taiwan by engaging actively in a variety of Islamic study sessions, both in digital and physical formats, attracting a significant number of Indonesian *ustadz/ustadzah* (religious educators). As Indonesian Muslims, they do consider religious educators as unquestionable authority in religious

matters.<sup>48</sup> These educators extend beyond the delivery of religious lectures, offering critical teachings that are specifically tailored to the needs of immigrants in Taiwan. Instruction in areas such as everyday-*fiqh*, ethical conducts, *tasawwuf*, the Qur'an, and *salamat* are crucial for Muslims adapting to life in a secular nation.

The material satisfaction of Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan exposes a new hole: spiritual fulfillment. Working abroad distances them from their hometowns with its unique routines, rituals, teachings, and culture. In this new environment, Taiwan presents them with the necessity to fulfill their spiritual values to avoid an emptiness that could lead to imbalances in life as a Muslim. Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong have a crucial need for religious education to satisfy their spiritual requirements.<sup>49</sup> This perspective aligns with the belief that a Muslim's life is not solely focused on material aspects but also on fulfilling spiritual needs. The ultimate aspiration of every Muslim is to achieve both material happiness (worldly contentment) and spiritual contentment,<sup>50</sup> as is the case with migrant workers.

### Strengthening Social Bonds

In addition to spiritual purposes, the involvement of Indonesian female migrant workers in Islamic study sessions is significantly driven by the desire to strengthen *silaturrahim* or social bonds. This motive is evident through various forms of their engagement in *pengajian* as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The strengthening of social bonds

Form	Narrative
Establishing discussion spaces	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Darul Hikmah has become a learning group with the motto 'Learn while you work'." (Mrs. Diyyan, Majelis Taklim Darul Hikmah On Air)</li> <li>2. "An important aspect for <i>ustadz</i> and leaders in the study sessions is the use of logical reasoning during</li> </ol>

<sup>48</sup> Imron Rosidi et al., "Negotiating Traditional Religious Authority In Indonesian Islam: The Case Of Madani Village," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24 (2024), p. 51, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i1.17320>.

<sup>49</sup> M. Syarif & Ali Muchasan, "Aktivitas Keberagamaan Para Pekerja Migran Indonesia Di Hong Kong," *Jurnal Inovatif* 8, 1 (2022).

<sup>50</sup> Amiruddin Amiruddin, Muhammad Qorib, and Zailani Zailani, "A Study of the Role of Islamic Spirituality in Happiness of Muslim Citizens," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 77 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6655>.

Form	Narrative
	discussions. For example, when they are at their workplace, dealing with Taiwanese people or non-Muslims, they should use easily understandable logic based on religious principles. Often, relying solely on logic leads to objections from them.” (Mr. Yudi, Chairman of IWAMIT)
Gaining new information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="420 404 1055 526">1. “There are numerous inputs and ideas from the community and government conveyed through these pengajian (KDEI Taipei).” (<i>Ustadz</i> Nanal, religious educator at Dinus)</li> <li data-bbox="420 526 1055 800">2. “There's a high demand for worship facilities in areas where Muslims are a minority. In every factory district, there are monthly <i>Yasin</i> recitation gatherings for male congregants, ongoing since 2015. The religious study groups and their various activities have made it easier to gather the Indonesian community. Many things are done, like sharing personal stories, expressing grievances, and discussing various topics.” (Mr. Yudi, Chairman of IWAMIT)</li> </ol>
Establishing new relationships	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="420 800 1055 1012">1. The religious study groups and their various activities have made it easier to gather the Indonesian community. Many things are done, like sharing personal stories, expressing grievances, and discussing various topics, forming new relationships with those previously unknown. (Mr. Yudi, Chairman of IWAMIT)</li> <li data-bbox="420 1012 1055 1190">2. “One testimony states: ‘And one unforgettable thing is that in this <i>taklim</i>, I was united with my soulmate, the one who completes my worship, the family leader I hope will guide me on the path to His paradise. Amen.’” (Mrs. Indah, administrator at Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air)</li> </ol>

The Islamic study sessions, conducted by numerous *majelis taklim* in Taiwan, function as pivotal forums for fostering social cohesion among both male and female migrant workers. These gatherings transcend the realm of mere religious instruction, evolving into integral centers for personal, communal, and situation-specific knowledge pertinent to workers in Taiwan. The participation of Indonesian female migrant workers in these groups yields substantial benefits, encompassing enhanced communication, valuable information

exchange, and relationship building. Notably, these sessions have also played a role in personal life developments, with some participants finding their life partners through active engagement in these *pengajian* activities.

Upon their arrival in Taiwan, each worker encounters others, leading to gatherings that foster mutual needs. A shared interest in earning a livelihood in a foreign land creates a strong bond of solidarity among them. Though they may have been strangers in Indonesia, their meeting in Taiwan necessitates acquaintance and communication. Consequently, a network of *silaturrahmi* (social bonds) forms among the workers, enabling them to get to know and assist each other. A tendency among Indonesians, especially when far from home, is to establish connections and communicate, leading to a collective agreement to respect one another. It is in this setting that female migrant workers meet, exchange information, and engage in discussions, particularly within *pengajian* or Islamic study sessions. This phenomenon aligns with research on Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia by Rofiq et al.,<sup>51</sup> indicating that community functions as a medium for informal and interactive Islamic knowledge production, distinct from traditional methods used in mosques and Islamic organizations.

For religious Indonesian people, happiness relates to spirituality.<sup>52</sup> In addition, communication, or *silaturrahmi* in Islamic terms, can be a means to achieve happiness and success in life.<sup>53</sup> The values of *silaturrahmi* are believed by Muslims to bring numerous benefits or blessings. The majority of these female migrant workers are rural Muslims with strong communal cultures but limited religious knowledge. *Pengajian* sessions enable them to invite religious teachers for reference in discussions, including the formation of harmonious relations among them. Their tendency differs from that in areas prone to conflict and dominance; instead, they foster supportive relationships. Such solidarity among Indonesian Muslims strengthens

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<sup>51</sup> Hasniar Rofiq, Luluk Fikri Zuhriyah, & A. Muhi, "Komunikasi Dakwah Komunitas Perempuan Pekerja Migran Di Malaysia," *Urnal Kopsis: Kajian Penelitian Dan Pemikiran Komunikasi Penyiaran Islam* 4, 2 (2022): pp. 94–106, <https://doi.org/10.33367/kpi.v4i2.2364>.

<sup>52</sup> Moh. Asror Yusuf et al., "The Construction of Happiness among Rural Javanese Muslims," *Teosofi* 13, 2 (2023).

<sup>53</sup> Amiruddin, Qorib, and Zailani, "A Study of the Role of Islamic Spirituality in Happiness of Muslim Citizens."

the idea of *Islam wasatiyyah* (moderate Islam) which and minimizes Islamophobia in Taiwan. This moderate stance is also evident regarding the existence of Indonesian Muslims in Canberra, Australia.<sup>54</sup>

### Seeking Life Anchors in Unstable Situations

The participation of female migrant workers in *pengajian* is also often motivated by the need to find life anchors in unstable situations. This search for stability and support by female migrant workers can be observed through various forms of their engagement in *pengajian* as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Seeking life anchors in unstable situations

Form	Narrative
Ideology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "Those who join <i>pengajian</i> usually have backgrounds involving frequent nighttime outings. Their journey through darker paths ultimately leads to a realization to understand religion. For instance, if they have a 3-year work contract, and spend 2 years indulging in vices, they eventually 'return' and dedicate the remaining year to religious pursuits. Practices like <i>Yasin</i> recitations and <i>tablil</i> become ways to 'reduce sins in a basket to sins in a bucket', striking at least a minimal balance between good and bad deeds committed." (Mr. Yudi, Chairman of IWAMIT)</li> <li>2. "Why An-Nahdliyah? Because Hasanah is the on-air <i>da'wah</i> medium of PCINU TAIWAN, all activities and the Council of Teachers at MT HASANAH must align with the teachings of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah An-Nahdliyah." (Ustadz Bambang, Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air)</li> </ol>
Charity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. "We are active in social activities through 'Darul Hikmah Cares', both in Taiwan and back home." (Mrs. Diyyan, advisor at Majelis Taklim Darul Hikmah On Air)</li> <li>2. "Majelis Taklim Hasanah is not just about religious activities but also social ones, like flood and natural disaster Donations, Al-Quran donations, providing books for madrasas, covering monthly tuition for underprivileged students, regular donations to the</li> </ol>

<sup>54</sup> J. M. Buaben, "Kamali, Mohammad, Hashim: The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam - The Qur'anic Principle of Wasatiyyah," *ICR Journal* 8, 3 (2017): pp. 444–446, <https://doi.org/10.52282/icr.v8i3.187>.

Form	Narrative
	Roudlotus Sholikhin Orphanage in Panggungrejo Village, Tulungagung. The group also plays a role in establishing and maintaining the musalla and Mambaul Hasanah Islamic boarding school in Tulungrejo Village, Besuki Subdistrict, Tulungagung. They also provide condolences to families of deceased congregants.” (Ustadz Bambang, Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air)
National unity and spirit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="457 461 1048 730">1. Our vision is to shape the personality of the Indonesian community and Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan with spiritual intelligence, intellect, emotional balance, strong work ethic, and social harmony based on sincerity, simplicity, independence, and Islamic brotherhood, as a foundation for a peaceful life in Taiwan and upholding the NKRI (Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia).” (Ustadz Nanal, Dinus)</li> <li data-bbox="457 730 1048 881">2. “Our foundation and guidelines at Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air are certainly based on the Quran, Hadith, <i>ijma'</i>, and <i>qiyas</i>, rooted in the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila.” (Ustadz Bambang, Majelis Taklim Hasanah On Air)</li> </ol>

The data presented elucidates the significant role played by female workers in Taiwan in their quest for stability amidst uncertain circumstances. The term 'uncertain' is used to describe the contrast between life in another country and their native homes, encompassing a range of challenges including economic, social, cultural, educational, and religious aspects. Taiwan, as a secular nation, offers its residents freedom, necessitating these workers to find a firm grounding to navigate life effectively and fulfill their initial purposes for coming to Taiwan. Solutions to this insecurity can be found in religious study sessions conducted by numerous *majelis taklim* in Taiwan.

Residing in a foreign country necessitates adaptation away from the comfort and stability of one's native region. Migrant workers in Taiwan, accustomed to fulfilling their needs through diverse resources in their home regions, confront significant challenges and difficulties in an unfamiliar setting. The absence of these familiar resources frequently leads to situations of instability or confusion that require collective solutions. Female migrant workers, in particular, shoulder

substantial responsibilities, not only in providing for their families but also in addressing their personal needs. Confronted with social, cultural, and religious environments that differ significantly from their own, they seek reliable guidance and a robust foundation for their lives. This foundation is critical not only on a personal level but also as members of a community and as citizens of their nation. Educational platforms that offer knowledge, skill development, and religious insight, such as the Line platform, are vital in this context.<sup>55</sup>

For these workers, distanced from family and familiar support systems, a stable and guided approach is crucial for effective life navigation. Emotional and mental stability, combined with rational decision-making, lays the groundwork for sound life choices. In contrast, a lack of personal conviction can lead to instability, resulting in harmful or even life-threatening decisions. Instances of extreme measures, shortcut approaches, and the neglect of familial duties often result in detrimental behavior, including criminal activities.<sup>56</sup> The cultivation of self-confidence and resilience is imperative in this context, fostering a positive self-perception and the ability to positively interact with one's environment. The impact of work on individual behavior, potentially leading to stress, is significant.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, developing coping strategies for stress, especially in psychologically challenging work environments, is an essential adaptive mechanism.

## Conclusion

The presence of Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan is pivotal in addressing the spiritual void through *pengajian* or Islamic study sessions. Their initiative to bring religious teachers, such as *ustadz/ustadzah* from Indonesia plays a significant role in optimally utilizing leisure time, enhancing *silaturahmi* or social bonds, and offering essential life anchors in their often unstable living situations. It is this spiritual fulfillment that empowers them to navigate and

<sup>55</sup> Suryaneta Suryaneta & Yuherina Gusman, "Indonesian Migrant Worker Learning Communities in Taiwan: It Is Not Only Online Learning, It Is Our Gathering," *Ideas: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Budaya* 8, 1 (2022), p. 161, <https://doi.org/10.32884/ideas.v8i1.599>.

<sup>56</sup> See Nisaul Fadillah, "Women's Majelis Taklim and the Gradual Move Toward Gender Equality."

<sup>57</sup> Juli Andriyani, "Strategi Coping Stres Dalam Mengatasi Problema Psikologis," *At-Taujih: Bimbingan Dan Konseling Islam* 2, 2 (2019), p. 37, <https://doi.org/10.22373/taujih.v2i2.6527>.

persevere through the various challenges encountered in Taiwan. This study enriches the body of research on Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan, which has largely concentrated on economic dimensions, worker legality, remuneration, and bilateral policies. It introduces an innovative perspective by highlighting the active role these workers play in alleviating spiritual voids through a deep-rooted understanding of their religious beliefs. Although this research primarily leverages insights from administrators of *majelis taklim* or Islamic study groups and does not cover the entire spectrum of experiences, it paves the way for future inquiries. Carried out via online methodologies, subsequent research could augment these findings with in-person, direct studies. Nevertheless, this study establishes an essential groundwork in the examination of spirituality and religious practices among Indonesian female migrant workers in Taiwan.

This study highlights the important role of Indonesian women migrant workers in Taiwan in addressing spiritual emptiness through *pengajian*, which not only fulfills religious needs but also strengthens social networks, enhances *silaturahmi*, and creates a stable ideological footing amidst life's uncertainties. Thus, this study broadens the scope of migration studies that previously focused on economic and policy aspects, by adding the spiritual dimension as a key component in the lives of migrants. For future research directions, this study proposes a more specific exploration of the educational dimension of *pengajian*, such as how the teaching and learning process in *pengajian* can influence the religious development and social skills of migrants. In addition, future research could deepen engagement with theoretical frameworks such as social identity theory and transnational migration to understand how their religious and national identities are formed in the diaspora. In a global academic context, the findings contribute to the discussion on the role of religion in international migration, especially in women's labor communities. The research opens a discourse on how religious practices can be a cultural resource that strengthens psychological resilience and social cohesion in migrant communities, thus providing relevant insights for cross-cultural studies and inclusivity-based migration policies. []

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