

Is Permaculture a Civilizational Return for Asian Muslims?

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines whether permaculture can be understood as a civilizational return for Asian Muslim societies rather than merely a trade in the model of sustainable farming from the West. Although permaculture was developed in the Global North as a response to the ecological and social emergencies of industrial agriculture, its significance in Muslim settings remains theoretically underexplored. Systematic integrative literature review (PRISMA-informed) methods were employed to integrate scholarly articles on permaculture studies, agroecology, Islamic environmental ethics, and historical studies of Muslim agricultural arrangements to develop a civilizational explanation of sustainability. The findings validate four interrelated themes. First, permaculture was developed in Western settings as a review of industrial innovation, ecological deprivation, and the philosophical parting of humans from nature. Second, Asian agroecological literature demonstrates that permaculture is often modified through pre-existing native and cultural knowledge systems rather than implemented as a complete epistemological disagreement. Third, Islamic environmental ethics offer a complete sustainability framework grounded in principles such as *khalifah* (stewardship), *amanah* (trust), *mizan* (balance), and *maslahah* (public welfare), which strongly unite with permaculture philosophies. Fourth, Muslim agricultural systems validated advanced ecological practices, including biodiversity management, water governance, and agroforestry, that mirrored core permaculture design philosophies but were later

marginalized through colonial reorganization and industrial modernization. These findings further claim that although permaculture signifies a civilizational remedy in Western contexts, it can be better understood in Asian Muslim contexts as a process of civilizational recapture that restarts ecological knowledge rooted within Islamic intellectual and agricultural traditions. This reframing provides decolonial sustainability by challenging direct models of environmental innovation and highlighting the balance between indigenous Islamic ecological ethics and contemporary penitentiary design frameworks.

1. Introduction

The unprecedented convergence of environmental crises in the 21st century has posed significant challenges to the development, progress, and humanities aspects of the ecological world (Marks, 2024). As a result, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, lack of freshwater, food security, and climate change are no longer perceived as isolated problems but rather as the interconnected manifestations of a deeper ecological crisis (Hoque & Sultana, 2024). The impact of such a crisis is evidenced in many key sectors, including modern industrial agriculture. While the Green Revolution has made prominent contributions toward agricultural productivity and global food security, numerous scholars, policymakers, and environmental practitioners have expressed concerns regarding its long-term ecological consequences (Smith, 2026). Globally, environmental degradation occurs due to intensive monocropping, high dependence on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, production systems driven by fossil fuels, and the commodification of natural resources (Baur, 2024). Subsequently, the question of sustainability is no longer a matter of academic discourse but rather a contemporary debate about the future of human civilization (Redclift, 2005).

One of the influential alternatives to industrial culture is the emergence of permaculture (Hathaway, 2016). First introduced by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s, permaculture is a design system widely used to create a sustainable human settlement that mirrors the resilience, diversity, and self-regulating characteristics of natural ecosystems (Holmgren, 2020). However, reducing permaculture to a set of agricultural techniques obscures its broader significance (Krebs & Bach, 2018). Some experts like Ferguson and Lovell (2014) have argued that permaculture is more than a simple farming system; it includes a worldview, social movement, and an ethical framework that challenges the ecological and social consequences of industrial modernity (Ferguson & Lovell, 2014). Today, permaculture has gained growing global influence, thus reflecting the increasing dissatisfaction with existing development models that prioritize economic growth by neglecting ecological integrity and community resilience (Olmos Carbonell, 2023).

The intellectual discourse on permaculture has subsequently raised questions regarding agricultural sustainability (Spangler, McCann & Ferguson, 2021). At its basis, permaculture constitutes critiques toward the philosophy of modern industrial civilization (Suh, 2022). It challenges the anthropocentric worldview that treats nature primarily as a resource for human exploitation, thus promoting a relational understanding of humanity as part of a broader ecological community (Moran, 2016).

Permaculture resonates with the emerging debate that the contemporary environmental crises cannot be fixed solely through technological innovation; it must be considered through the lens of environmental humanities, ecological economics, and sustainability studies (Veteto & Lockyer, 2008). This has prompted the argument that deeper transformation in values, ethics, and conceptions is necessary to understand ecological sustainability amid the human-nature relationship (Artmann, 2023).

Despite its impact, this intellectual shift has raised several important yet underexplored questions. First, since permaculture emerged in Western societies in response to the erosion of traditional relationships between industrial agriculture and nature, does it maintain the same ideological meaning in non-Western contexts (Wright, 2021)? Second, does permaculture have the same meaning within the Muslim societies whose intellectual and historical traditions of agriculture contain ecological bonding and a long-standing philosophy of stewardship, ecological balance, moderation, and communal responsibility (Dowdall, 2022)? These questions are primarily triggered by the existing literature's generalization of permaculture as a universal sustainability framework with similar applicability across different cultural contexts. This approach risks overlooking important civilizational differences in understanding environmental knowledge.

Recent scholars in Islamic environmental ethics suggest that the principles of modern sustainability discourse have long been practiced within Islamic Intellectual traditions (Wani & Azhar, 2024). Islamic Intellectual concepts, such as *tawhid* (unity), *khalifah* (stewardship), *amanah* (trust), *mizan* (balance), *adl* (justice), and *maslahah* (public welfare), offer a complete ethical framework that governs civilizational relationships with the ecological world (Prayitno & Lie, 2025). Many studies have demonstrated that environmental stewardship is not limited to Islamic intellectuals but is rather deeply connected within the Quranic teachings, Prophetic traditions, and wider Islamic concepts of socio-ecological traditions (Helfaya, Kotb & Hanafi, 2018). Contemporary analyses further argue that sustainability is not a foreign concept imposed upon Islam; instead, environmental protection and responsible resource management have long been integral components of the Islamic worldview.

Such complications are supported by historical evidence advocating that conventional narratives portray sustainability as a contemporary concept innovated and originated in the modern West. The literature also confirms that during the classical period of Islamic civilization, Muslim societies had developed sophisticated agricultural systems equipped with crop diversity, water conservation, agroforestry, ecological adaptation, and community-based resource management (Mohd. Zain, Tounchibine & Lechheb, 2024). Härmälä (2014) further claimed that environmental practices, such as the Arab Agricultural Revolution, medieval irrigation systems, *hima* conservation zones, and communal water management institutions, closely resemble the principles of well-promoted contemporary agroecology and permaculture. These historical experiences confirm that ecological stewardship was institutionalized within the social, legal, and agricultural structures of Muslim societies rather than a mere ethical idea (Saniotis, 2012).

Nevertheless, contemporary Asian experiences with permaculture distinctively differ from the Western literature (Wang & Matsumoto, 2025). By replacing the local knowledge systems used in Asia, the Western term “permaculture” is adapted to the indigenous ecological traditions, community practices, and religious worldviews (Gashute & Hale, 2023). Evidence from several Asian countries, such as Indonesia,

Malaysia, and Nepal, validates the superiority of permaculture in Asia as it echoes the pre-existing socio-cultural understanding of land, community, and environmental responsibilities (Smithies, 2019). In many cases, farmers and practitioners in Asian countries do not perceive permaculture as a radical innovation that is internalized externally; it is a framework already rooted within their own local traditions.

The discussion thus far highlights a significant theoretical gap. While many scholars have explored the development of permaculture in the West, they have overlooked its interpretation in societies with other civilizational histories. From Western societies' perspectives, permaculture is a response to ecological disagreement in general and a corrective measure to the environmental and social consequences of industrial modernity in specific. However, from the Muslim societies' perspectives, the relationship is fundamentally different: permaculture should not be considered an alternative paradigm due to its close association with many ethical, ecological, and agricultural principles within the Islamic civilization. Instead, it may constitute the recovery, renewal, and rearticulation processes of an existing civilizational inheritance.

This study seeks to move beyond conventional discussions of sustainability and agriculture by examining permaculture through a civilizational lens. Rather than asking whether permaculture is compatible with Islam, the article asks a more fundamental question: Is permaculture a civilizational return for Asian Muslims? By bringing together discourses on permaculture, agroecology, Islamic environmental ethics, and historical Muslim agricultural systems, the study argues that the significance of permaculture cannot be understood solely as a contemporary environmental movement. For many Asian Muslim societies, it may represent the rediscovery of ecological principles historically embedded within Islamic civilization but were progressively marginalized through colonial intervention, developmentalist ideologies, and industrial agricultural modernization. This perspective views permaculture not simply as a pathway toward sustainability; it is also a potential means for civilizational renewal.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Ecological Crisis of Industrial Agriculture: The Western Origins of Permaculture

Scholars believe that permaculture was not developed in an academic vacuum (Kristensen, 2018); its origins are associated with the ecological contradictions caused by industrial modernity (Roux-Rosier, Azambuja & Islam, 2018). The post-war agricultural model is eminent for the celebration of increasing agricultural productivity through mechanization, synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, monocropping, and fossil-fuel-intensive production-unquestionably expanding global food supplies (Kleppel, 2014). Nevertheless, this model has shaped an irony: the search for agricultural abundance increasingly damaged the ecological foundations upon which agriculture was dependent.

A review paper on permaculture by Ferguson and Lovell's (2014) has propounded a wider criticism toward industrial agriculture. They argue that modern and contemporary agricultural systems prioritize instant productivity by eroding biodiversity, ecological resilience, and long-term resilience. The industrial farm system is not a self-sustaining ecosystem; it depends on external technological inputs to transform agriculture from an ecological process into an industrial enterprise. Hathaway

(2016) further believes that modern agriculture degrades soil and freshwater, destroys habitat and biodiversity, and emits greenhouse gases. This underscores environmental crisis as the structural outcome of modern industrial agriculture rather than an unintended side effect.

In this context, Ferguson and Lovell's (2014) believe that the emergence of permaculture extends beyond an alternative agricultural technique; it is a criticism toward civilizational expectations in sustaining industrial development. This alternative agriculture challenges the existing belief that technological development alone is capable of overcoming ecological limits. Subsequently, the rise of permaculture recognizes the relationship between humanity and nature instead of a mere criticism of technologies generating environmental degradation.

2.2. Beyond Environmental Crisis: The Philosophical Rupture Between Humans and Nature

Permaculture addresses the ecological crisis, which is primarily a philosophical crisis. Rather than considering nature as a living system where human beings are embedded, modern industrial agriculture views it as an object to be managed (Droz, 2022). Such a worldview perceives land, water, and biodiversity as merely a production unit, an input, and an obstacle to efficiency, respectively. This results in continuous exploitation of nature.

Permaculture imposes a direct challenge to this ontological position of modern agriculture (Muradian & Gómez-Baggethun, 2021; Vetlesen, 2023). It does not seek to dominate ecological processes but rather to design the human system according to the ecological principles of nature. At this stage, permaculture articulates a clear rejection of the modern philosophy of agriculture where human progress depends on control over natural systems. Instead, it advances a relational worldview regarding the interplay of human progress and cooperation with ecological processes.

This absolute distinction is important in understanding the larger significance of permaculture. The permaculture movement is a philosophy that addresses more than ecological degradation; its perception is to repair the rupture of the human-nature relation. Permaculture theorists often remind modern agricultural theorists that human beings are ecological phenomena themselves. It implies that human beings are prime members of the ecosystem rather than a damage.

2.3. From Agricultural Reform to Civilizational Critique

The most profound input of permaculture is the critical overview of industrial civilization itself. Suh (2022) argues that unlike modern agriculture, the philosophical contribution of permaculture in agriculture is not typical; it goes beyond the contributions of economic growth, consumption, development, and progress. It raises further questions in modern agriculture about whether environmental crises can be resolved within the agricultural framework that produces them. In this context, permaculture incorporates ethical and philosophical influences (Edelman & Welford, 2017) that integrate harmony, balance, and interconnectedness with economic growth, development, and progress. Additionally, permaculture mirrors industrial modernity's growing dissatisfaction with reductionism, while searching for alternative ways of managing the relationship between humans, communities, and ecosystems (Kim et al.,

2023). Therefore, permaculture should not be interpreted merely as a set of agricultural techniques; it is a civilizational response to the ecological, social, and spiritual consequences of modernity (Etuk & Inwang, 2024). It does not seek alternatives to redesign farms but rather to rebuild the human-nature relationship.

The above discussion highlights an important historical fact: permaculture emerged in societies that had experienced a profound ecological rupture. Industrial modernity converted nature into a material object of economic exploitation by weakening the traditional relationship with land and local knowledge systems. Therefore, permaculture functioned as a corrective response to a specific civilizational crisis. This raises a question that remains largely absent from the literature: did Muslim societies experience the same rupture? This is because the existing embedding of ecological stewardship, biodiversity, community-oriented agriculture, and ethical obligations toward nature within Islamic civilization indicates the significant connotation of permaculture changes. It illustrates that permaculture is an ecological innovation for the West but a civilizational recovery in Muslim contexts.

2.4. Colonial Disruption, Developmentalism, and the Marginalization of Islamic Ecological Traditions

A potential objection to the argument advanced in this article concerns the apparent contradiction between Islamic ecological principles and contemporary environmental challenges in many Muslim-majority societies (Murad, 2023). If concepts such as *khalifah* (stewardship), *amanah* (trust), *mizan* (balance), and *maslahah* (public welfare) have long been embedded within Islamic thought and agricultural practices (Khalid, 2010), why do many Muslim societies today face problems of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and unsustainable agricultural development? This question is important because it highlights the distinction between the existence of a civilizational tradition and its uninterrupted preservation. Rather than focusing on the fact that Muslim societies have continuously maintained Islamic ecological principles in their original form and that historical Muslim agricultural systems were free from environmental challenges, this article argues that many ecological traditions associated with Islamic civilization were progressively disrupted, marginalized, or transformed through the combined forces of colonial intervention, developmentalist policies, and industrial modernization.

Across Asia, colonial administrations frequently reorganized agricultural systems to serve imperial economic interests (Arora & Stirling, 2023). Traditional mixed farming systems were increasingly replaced by export-oriented cash-crop production focusing on commodities such as rubber, tea, sugar, cotton, and other plantation crops. These transformations altered long-established relationships between local communities, land, water, and biodiversity. Agricultural landscapes that had previously emphasized diversity, local adaptation, and community management became increasingly integrated into global markets and extractive economic structures (Alkhalili, Dajani & Mahmoud, 2023). In many regions, colonial land policies weakened customary systems of resource governance and undermined local ecological knowledge that had evolved over generations.

The post-colonial period often reinforced (Roy, 2017) rather than reversed these transformations. Newly independent states frequently embraced modernization theories that equated development with industrialization, mechanization, and

agricultural intensification. The Green Revolution introduced high-yield crop varieties, synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation technologies, and monocropping systems that substantially increased agricultural productivity. While these interventions contributed to food security in many contexts, they also encouraged dependence on external inputs and reduced the importance of traditional ecological practices. Agricultural success was increasingly measured in terms of production and economic growth rather than ecological resilience, biodiversity, or long-term sustainability. As a result, indigenous and Islamic approaches to environmental stewardship were often relegated to the margins of agricultural policy and development planning. Moreover, knowledge systems grounded in local ecological adaptation, communal resource management, ethical restraint, and spiritual responsibility toward nature were frequently dismissed as traditional, inefficient, or incompatible with modern development. The dominance of technocratic approaches to agriculture contributed to a gradual erosion of the cultural and intellectual foundations that had historically supported sustainable land management practices within many Muslim societies.

From this perspective, the contemporary environmental challenges faced by Muslim-majority societies should not be regarded as evidence that Islamic civilization lacked ecological principles. Rather, they reflect the historical displacement of those principles through colonial restructuring, developmentalist ideology, and industrial agricultural expansion. Therefore, the ecological crisis experienced by many Muslim societies today extends beyond a failure of tradition; it emerges from the weakening of traditional systems of environmental knowledge and stewardship.

This interpretation strengthens the central argument of the present study: if colonialism and modernization contributed to the marginalization of Islamic ecological traditions, contemporary interest in permaculture among Asian Muslims can be understood as more than the adoption of a new environmental framework. It may represent an effort to recover forms of ecological knowledge, ethical responsibility, and community-based stewardship that were historically embedded within Islamic civilization but were progressively displaced during the modern period. In this sense, permaculture functions not merely as a strategy for environmental sustainability but as a vehicle for civilizational renewal and ecological remembrance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Integrative Literature Review (SILR) method to explore permaculture as a potential civilizational return for Asian Muslim societies. The method was selected because the research question extends beyond the evaluation of agricultural practices and requires the combination of various bodies of knowledge, including permaculture studies, agroecology, Islamic environmental ethics, sustainability literature, and historical analyses of Muslim agricultural practices. Unlike conventional systematic reviews that focus primarily on empirical studies, integrative reviews allow the inclusion of theoretical, historical, conceptual, and qualitative research, making them particularly suitable for interdisciplinary investigations of complex socio-ecological phenomena.

The review followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach to ensure transparency, replicability, and methodological

rigor. PRISMA-based approaches are widely recognized for reducing selection bias and providing a systematic process for identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant literature.

3.2. Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted across four major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Dimensions and Google Scholar.

The search focused on publications published between 1974 and 2025. The starting year was selected because it coincides with the publication of Watson's seminal work on the Arab Agricultural Revolution, which remains foundational to scholarly discussions of historical Muslim agricultural systems.

The literature search utilized several keywords combined using Boolean operators, including:

3.2.1. *Permaculture-related terms*

- i. "Permaculture"
- ii. "Agroecology"
- iii. "Regenerative agriculture"
- iv. "Sustainable agriculture"

3.2.2. *Islam-related terms*

- i. "Islamic environmental ethics"
- ii. "Islam and sustainability"
- iii. "Khalifah"
- iv. "Amanah"
- v. "Mizan"
- vi. "Islamic ecology"

3.2.3. *Historical agriculture terms*

- i. "Arab Agricultural Revolution"
- ii. "Traditional Muslim agriculture"
- iii. "Islamic irrigation"
- iv. "Hima"
- v. "Harim"

3.2.4. *Civilizational and cultural terms*

- i. "Environmental stewardship"
- ii. "Traditional ecological knowledge"
- iii. "Indigenous agriculture"
- iv. "Civilizational sustainability"

3.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were employed to ensure the selection of relevant and quality articles.

3.4. Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- i. Examined permaculture, agroecology, regenerative agriculture, or sustainable farming systems;
- ii. Discussed Islamic environmental ethics, sustainability, or ecological stewardship;
- iii. Investigated historical Muslim agricultural practices or environmental governance systems;
- iv. Focused on Asia, Muslim-majority societies, or comparative civilizational perspectives;
- v. Were published in peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, edited volumes, or reputable institutional reports;
- vi. Were published in English.

3.5. Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

- i. Focused solely on technical agricultural productivity without broader ecological or social implications;
- ii. Addressed sustainability without reference to agriculture, ecology, or environmental ethics;
- iii. Contained conference abstracts, opinion pieces, blogs, or non-scholarly publications;
- iv. Were duplicate records.

3.6. Screening and Selection Process

The literature identification process followed four stages consistent with the PRISMA guidelines:

Stage 1: Identification

The database search generated an initial pool of publications.

Stage 2: Screening

Titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess their relevance to the research question.

Stage 3: Eligibility Assessment

Full-text articles were examined against the inclusion criteria.

Stage 4: Final Selection

Studies meeting all criteria were retained for thematic analysis.

A PRISMA flow diagram was developed to document the selection process and ensure transparency.

3.7. Data Extraction

A structured review matrix was created for each selected study to extract the following information:

Category	Description
Author(s)	Name(s) of author(s)
Year	Publication year
Geographic focus	Country or region
Research focus	Main topic
Key concepts	Relevant theoretical concepts

Category	Description
Findings	Main conclusions
Relevance to civilizational return thesis	Analytical contribution

This process enabled systematic comparison across diverse bodies of literature.

3.8. Analytical Framework

All studies were analyzed using qualitative thematic synthesis. In this study, permaculture was examined as a civilizational discourse rather than treating it solely as an agricultural model. The iterative coding and comparison process revealed five overarching themes.

3.8.1. Theme 1: Ecological Crisis and the Critique of Industrial Modernity

Studies examining the environmental consequences of industrial agriculture and the emergence of permaculture as a corrective response.

3.8.2. Theme 2: Ecological Knowledge and Cultural Continuity in Asia

Studies investigating the adaptation of agroecological and permaculture practices through existing cultural traditions and local ecological knowledge.

3.8.3. Theme 3: Islamic Environmental Ethics

Studies exploring concepts such as *tawhid*, *khalifah*, *amanah*, *mizan*, and *maslahah* as foundations for ecological stewardship.

3.8.4. Theme 4: Historical Muslim Agricultural Systems

Studies concerning biodiversity, irrigation systems, communal resource management, and ecological adaptation within Islamic civilization.

3.8.5. Theme 5: Colonial Disruption and Agricultural Modernization

Studies highlighting the contributions of colonialism, developmentalism, and industrial agriculture to the marginalization of traditional ecological systems.

The final stage involved comparing these themes to assess whether contemporary permaculture represents an environmental innovation or the revival of existing ecological principles within Islamic civilization.

3.9. Theoretical Positioning

Rather than assuming sustainability as a universal modern concept, the analysis investigated how ecological knowledge was embedded in particular historical, cultural, and religious traditions. The concept of civilizational return was employed as an interpretive framework to explore whether contemporary sustainability movements might, in some contexts, represent the recovery of marginalized traditions rather than the creation of entirely new paradigms.

Within this framework, permaculture was perceived not as a technical agricultural system but as a broader intellectual and ethical project that redefines the relationships between humans, communities, and the natural environment.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Permaculture Emerged as a Response to a Western Civilizational Crisis

The literature demonstrates that permaculture emerged in Western societies as a response to the ecological, social, and philosophical paradoxes of industrial modernity. Several scholars (e.g., Ferguson and Lovell, Hathaway, and Suh) claimed that industrial agriculture converted farming from an ecological movement into an industrial procedure that relied on fossil fuels, synthetic inputs, and monocultural manufacturing systems. While this conversion of agriculture increased productivity, it also caused soil degradation, biodiversity loss, environmental pollution, and growing ecological susceptibility.

Beyond environmental concerns, the literature reveals a deeper evaluation rooted in permaculture dissertation. Industrial modernity stimulated a worldview of nature as a resource for economic manipulation rather than a living structure within which human societies were ingrained. Permaculture developed as an effort to return ecological associations through philosophies of multiplicity, integration, resilience, and arrangements thinking (Yadav et al., 2023). The first major finding of this review is the need to understand permaculture not simply as an agricultural revolution but as a comeback to a wider civilizational disaster considered by ecological interruption, social disintegration, and philosophical parting from nature.

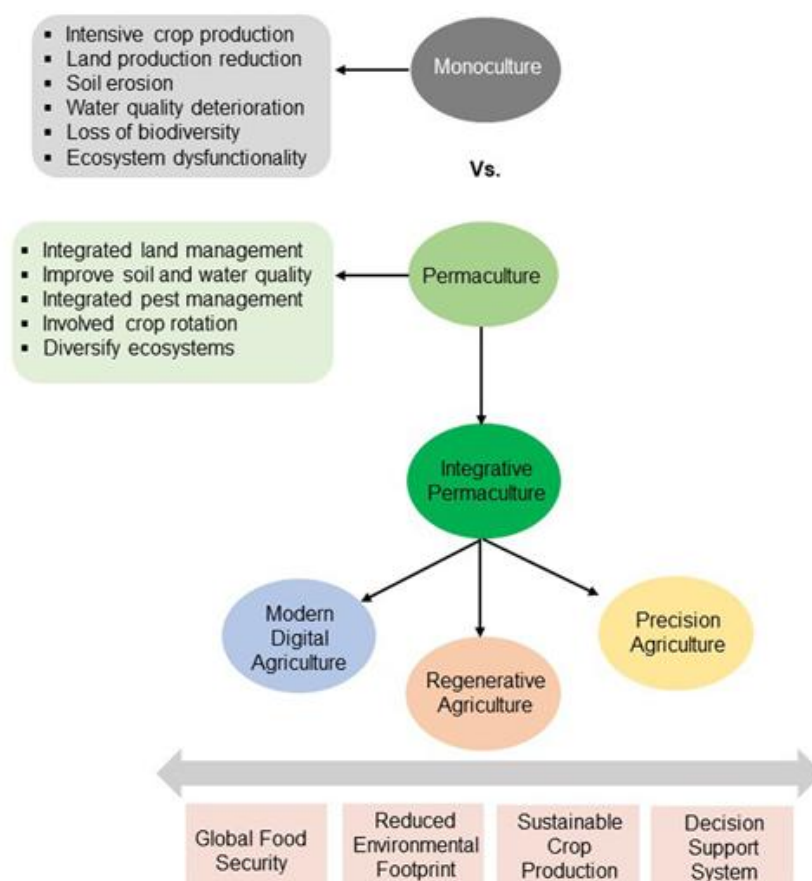


Fig 1: The above flowchart showing the targets to achieve agricultural sustainability through integrative permaculture and regenerative agriculture using modern agricultural tools to attain global food security. From “Regenerative Agriculture and Integrative Permaculture for Sustainable and Technology Driven Global Food Production and Security,” by McLennon et al., 2021, *Agronomy Journal*, 113(6), p. 4543. Copyright 1999-2026 by John Wiley and Sons Inc or related companies.

4.2. Asian Experiences Reveal Continuity Rather Than Rupture

The second key finding addresses the different manners through which permaculture has been implemented within Asian settings. The literature from Southeast Asian countries, such as Nepal, Indonesia, and Malaysia, indicates that permaculture hardly functions as an alternative for current agricultural civilizations. Experts generally combine permaculture philosophies with local environmental knowledge, native farming practices, and culturally rooted considerations of environmental stewardship. Many studies advocate that successful execution lies in adaptation rather than replacement. Permaculture was most effective when understood through local cultural backgrounds and historical agricultural understandings. Furthermore, agroforestry, agroecology (Wezel et al., 2020), mixed farming, biodiversity conservation, communal resource management, and ecological adaptation were frequently identified as existing characteristics of traditional Asian agricultural systems rather than modernized alternatives presented by permaculture. These findings challenge the universalistic descriptions that represent permaculture as a globally disseminative Western framework by suggesting that in many Asian settings, permaculture functions as an instrument for identifying, stimulating, and returning pre-existing ecological civilizations.

4.3. Strong Convergence Exists Between Permaculture Ethics and Islamic Environmental Ethics

The third key finding underscores the union between permaculture ethics and Islamic ecological understanding. The literature (e.g., Härmälä, 2014) establishes that notions fundamental to permaculture are intensely rooted within Islamic intellectual backgrounds. The belief of Earth Care aligns meticulously with the Islamic notions of *amanah* (trust) and *khalifah* (stewardship); People Care resounds with *maslahah* (public welfare) and *adl* (justice); and Fair Share echoes the Islamic values of fairness (*wasatiyyah*) and ethical distinction (*ihsan*). More importantly, Islamic ecological ethics resemble sustainability from an inclusive worldview deeply rooted in *tawhid* (unity), which assesses humanity and nature as unified fundamentals within a delightfully ordered formation (Al-Jayyousi, 2016). This view complements the importance of permaculture on ecological interrelation and structures rationality. Therefore, the literature indicates that Muslim engagement with permaculture frequently centers on gratitude rather than philosophical revision, and that many philosophies endorsed by permaculture have religious validity within Islamic civilizations.

4.4. Historical Muslim Agricultural Systems Embodied Permaculture Principles

The key findings of this review study were developed from existing evidence on Muslim agricultural systems. Previous studies (e.g., Watson, 1983; Kirchner et al., 2023; Decker, 2009) examining the Arab Agricultural Revolution, medieval irrigation systems, community-based water governance, conservation institutions such as *hima* and *harim*,

and traditional agricultural practices across Muslim societies revealed extensive evidence of ecological management based on diversity, integration, conservation, and sustainability. Other studies (e.g., Avni, 2020; Watson, 1983) also identified several characteristics in historical Muslim agricultural systems that closely resemble contemporary permaculture principles, such as: biodiversity and polyculture, water conservation, agroforestry, ecological adaptation, community-based resource governance and long-term stewardship of natural resources.

The findings also specify that ecological sustainability was not merely an intangible ethical ideal within Islamic civilization but was also recognized through agricultural practices, legal mechanisms, and social organizations. Accordingly, many practices currently endorsed through permaculture can be understood as historically accustomed within Muslim agricultural civilizations.

4.5. Colonialism and Modernization Disrupted Ecological Continuity

The final emerging theme addresses a potential challenge to the central argument: Since the Islamic civilization generally possessed strong ecological traditions, why do contemporary Muslim societies experience significant environmental problems? The literature suggests that colonialism, developmentalism, and industrial modernization significantly interrupted traditional ecological systems (Carroll et al., 2025). Colonial land policies encouraged export-oriented monoculture production, weakened customary institutions, and integrated local agriculture into global commodity markets (Sharifian et al., 2022). Subsequently, post-colonial development strategies frequently adopted Green Revolution models that emphasized mechanization, synthetic inputs, and productivity maximization. These processes marginalized traditional ecological knowledge and weakened historical systems of stewardship that had previously supported sustainable agricultural practices (Aswani, Lemahieu & Sauer, 2018; Sinthumule, 2023). Therefore, contemporary environmental degradation in Muslim societies should not be interpreted as evidence of an absence of Islamic ecological traditions; it reflects the historical displacement of those traditions.

5. Discussion

5.1. Reframing Permaculture Through a Civilizational Lens

Most literature generally describes permaculture as a modern ecological philosophy that emerged in response to environmental degradation caused by industrial agriculture. Although this explanation accurately identifies the Western origins of permaculture, the findings of this study suggest that the permaculture framework should be reviewed from the Muslim context. It subsequently endorses the framework as an insufficient model within Muslim circumstances.

The majority of literature postulates that permaculture inhabits varied intellectual positions across different civilizational settings. For Western societies, permaculture acts as a corrective response to ecological rupture resulting from industrial agriculture; for Muslim societies, many of the core principles of permaculture have been instilled in religious ethics, environmental governance systems, and traditional agricultural practices. This distinctive position is theoretically significant as it challenges the notion that sustainability was essentially derived from Western innovation toward non-Western societies.

5.2. From Sustainability as Innovation to Sustainability as Recovery

Contemporary sustainability discourse tends to assume that ecological solutions must come through new technologies, policies, or management systems. The findings of this review propose an alternative. For Asian Muslim societies, sustainability may be understood not primarily as innovation but as recovery. It is evident historically that ecological stewardship, biodiversity management, water conservation, and community-oriented agriculture were already embedded within Islamic civilization long before the development of modern sustainability frameworks. Therefore, permaculture becomes more significant, relevant, and acceptable for Asian Muslim societies not because it introduces completely new ideas but because it offers a modern philosophical language through which older faded ecological traditions can be rediscovered and reinterpreted.

5.3. Decolonizing Sustainability Knowledge

The findings also contribute to the rising debates regarding the decolonization of sustainability information. Most contemporary literature on sustainability assumes that environmental solutions originate within modern Western institutions and are later transferred to other societies. This narrative appears to be narrow and risks overlooking the ecological information embedded in non-Western civilizations. Thus, the present study establishes that many principles eminent in agroecology and permaculture have a historical trend within Asian Islamic civilization. Such a position challenges the direct narratives of environmental progress and emphasizes the importance of civilizational knowledge systems in addressing the contemporary ecological crisis in agriculture. From this viewpoint, sustainability is not merely a technical challenge but also an epistemological question about whose knowledge is recognized, preserved, and legitimized.

5.4. Permaculture as Civilizational Renewal

The central contribution of this study lies in the development of the concept of civilizational return.

The literature suggests that contemporary Muslim engagement with permaculture is best understood not as the adoption of a foreign environmental ideology but as a process of reconnecting with ecological values historically embedded within Islamic civilization. Civilizational return does not imply a romantic restoration of the past or a rejection of contemporary knowledge; it refers to the recovery and adaptation of historical ethical principles, ecological practices, and systems of stewardship in response to contemporary environmental challenges. Thus, permaculture serves as a bridge between historical Islamic ecological traditions and modern sustainability concerns by providing a practical framework to translate stewardship, balance, moderation, community welfare, and ecological responsibility into contemporary agricultural and social practices.

6. Conclusion

This review demonstrates that permaculture emerged in Western societies as a response to the ecological and philosophical crises of industrial modernity. However, evidence from Islamic environmental ethics, Asian agroecological experiences, and historical Muslim agricultural systems reveals substantial continuity between

permaculture principles and long-standing Islamic traditions of stewardship and ecological management.

The findings suggest that for Asian Muslims, permaculture can be interpreted less as an imported sustainability paradigm and more as a civilizational return to ecological values that were historically embedded within Islamic civilization but later marginalized through colonialism, developmentalism, and industrial agricultural modernization. The significance of permaculture extends beyond environmental sustainability—it represents a potential pathway for civilizational renewal, enabling Muslim societies to engage contemporary ecological challenges through intellectual and ethical resources rooted within their own historical traditions.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

IIUM Research Ethics Committee (IREC).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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