Religious syncretism

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Religious Syncretism as a New Model for Interreligious Harmony: A Study of Tridharma in Indonesia

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Abstract:
The government policy of the New Order era (1966-1998), which required uniformity in religious practices and had implications for the emergence of the Tridharma house of worship, significantly affected the religious practices of the Chinese community in various regions of Indonesia, creating a distinctive dynamic of syncretism. This study explains the impact of New Order Era government policies on religious uniformity in the syncretism of the Tridharma (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism). This qualitative study employs a case study approach to analyze the effects of such policies on the practice of religious syncretism among Tridharma adherents. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with Tridharma figures and an analysis of policy documents and religious practices. This study demonstrates that the Tridharma tradition is not simply a theological or ideological interaction between religions, but rather a complex space where power, identity, and socio-political strategies are negotiated. As a syncretic formation, the Tridharma emerged as a creative response to historical repression, while also serving as an expression of Chinese-Indonesian religious culture within the framework of Indonesian nationalism. The Tridharma is not merely a passive blending of various traditions; it actively reconfigures the relationship between religion and state power, thus offering a distinctive model of syncretism shaped by certain socio-historical conditions. This case highlights the potential of negotiated religious spaces to foster more inclusive and harmonious interreligious relations in a pluralistic society. These findings suggest that the practical syncretism of the Tridharma can serve as a constructive paradigm for managing religious diversity and encourage ongoing dialogical coexistence in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: Religious Syncretism, Religious Policy, New Order Era, Tridharma (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism),

Introduction

Although Indonesia is recognized as a country that values religious diversity, certain state policies mandate religious uniformity. This indicates a shift from a period of religious freedom to one characterized by restrictions on religious practitioners. One policy from the New Order era (Mazya et al., 2024) was the strict enforcement of assimilation, which altered the nature of interreligious relations within the Chinese community(Hoon, 2006). Importantly, the relationship among Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism in Indonesia has evolved uniquely since the 1965 coup.

The concept of Tridharma gives rise to two types of relationships: sociological and theological. In sociological relationships, a hidden conflict exists because the Tridharma house of worship originally functioned as a temple for Confucian and Taoist practices (Komang Ariyanto, 2023). In contrast, a Buddhist place of worship is known as a Viharā. Conversely, the Tridharma house of worship promotes theological connections, resulting in religious syncretism (Tanggok, 2018; Vermeersch, 2020).

The adaptation of the three religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism—to local Indonesian culture does not pose sociological or theological problems; rather, it presents ideological and political challenges (Goh, 2009; Kwartanada, 2021). Although many Chinese Indonesians acknowledge that Confucianism and Taoism are closely tied to “Chineseness,” it is undeniable that religious syncretism within the Chinese Indonesian community incorporates elements of all three traditions: Confucianism in the form of social ethics, Buddhism through rituals and belief systems, and Taoism in traditional healing and ceremonial practices (Triplett, 2022). These religious elements are rarely separated clearly in daily religious practice. The notion of “Chineseness” here reflects how many individuals culturally and religiously identify as Chinese without feeling compelled to adhere exclusively to a single religious tradition. This has allowed syncretic practices to persist over time (Goh, 2009). For decades, Chinese Indonesians have employed religious syncretism as a means of maintaining their traditions amid political pressure (Tahara, 2023). Through such syncretism, Chinese identity in Indonesia continues to evolve dynamically, shaping a unique expression of spiritual life (Wahab et al., 2024; Warnis et al., 2024).

The spiritual life of the Chinese people did not thrive during the New Order era due to the Indonesian government's policy prohibiting the public use of the Chinese language and culture. As a result, many Chinese turned to other officially recognized religions, such as Christianity or Islam, to avoid discrimination. This phenomenon of religious conversion poses a challenge to the concept of 'Chineseness' (Warnis et al., 2024). Therefore, establishing the Tridharma institution as a place of worship is the best solution. However, following the political reforms of the late 1990s, a significant shift occurred as more inclusive policies began to be implemented. The renewed recognition of Confucianism as an official religion in Indonesia encouraged the Chinese community to openly express their religious and cultural identity. This not only strengthens their position in society but also facilitates the preservation of long-standing syncretic traditions (Ubaedillah, 2023).

Studies on syncretism as a means of weaving religious harmony have been conducted by various researchers in countries with significant Chinese populations. Mubah and Anabarja (2020) show that syncretic traditions are often used as a way to build bridges between Chinese traditions and Indonesian identity, as well as to embrace pluralism within Indonesia’s multicultural society. Meanwhile, in Vietnam, the study by Son and Duong on Tridharma as a ritual of power during the period 1428–1527 does not specifically position syncretism as a vehicle for harmony among the three teachings. Instead, one tradition (Confucianism) is shown to dominate, while the others (Buddhism and Taoism) function primarily as cultural and spiritual supplements (Le & Tran, 2024). In addition to Son and Duong, Sem Vermeersch's research offers more of a critique of what is commonly considered syncretism, by examining the case of Tridharma in Korea during the Goryeo Dynasty (918–1392). He concludes that the fundamental equality between Buddhism and Confucianism in Korea does not indicate syncretism, but rather ecumenism, in which the two systems complement each other and express the same universal truth(Vermeersch, 2020). Brook, on the other hand, prefers to describe Tridharma as a "condominium" shared by Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism (Dung, 2022).

In contrast to various studies that question the fulfillment of syncretism in the concept of Tridharma across several countries, this study departs from the assumption that in Indonesia, a blurring of religious identity has occurred among the Chinese, especially after 1965, leading to syncretism in their worship orientation. This study explains how the New Order Era Government's policy on religious uniformity led to the unique syncretism of the Tridharma (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism), as the elements within these three religions remained distinct and unobscured.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, focusing on case studies, to examine the impact of government policies from the New Order era on the practice of religious syncretism in Tridharma houses of worship in Indonesia. The collected data is categorized into primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through an in-depth interview with Xs. Ir. Djohan Ajuan, SE, the General Chairman of the Indonesian Confucian Religious Clergy Association (Parakhin), who represents figures able to elucidate the teachings of Confucianism in the practice of the Tridharma; David H Wan Kheng, a member of the Board of the Tridharma Places of Worship Association (PTITD), represents individuals who can explain the Tridharma as an organization responsible for the management of places of worship; Butet Yin, Chairman of the Tridharma Buddhist Council (Magabutri) and a member of the Board of the Catur Paramita Temple, represents a figure who can clarify the Tridharma as a teaching; Muslim Linggow, Chairman of the High Council of Confucianism (Matakin), represents a figure who can articulate the distinctions between Taoism and Confucianism in the practice of the Tridharma; Lamirin, a Buddhist academic able to explain Buddhist teachings in the Tridharma context; Ws. Darsana, the founder of Matakin in Bali, represents a figure who can elucidate the theological relationship among Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, as well as several other unnamed figures.

The collected data was tested using source triangulation by comparing interview data and secondary data to ensure the validity of the findings. Furthermore, thematic analysis was employed to identify the primary patterns in the practice of Tridharma syncretism, particularly in terms of the integration of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, as well as the emerging social dynamics. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a narrative description, which outlines findings related to the transformation of houses of worship, challenges in preserving traditional elements, and their impact on interreligious relations. This methodology enables the research to provide insights into how state policies influence the religious practices of the Chinese community, as well as the integration of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, and the emerging social dynamics. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a narrative description, which outlines findings related to the transformation of houses of worship, challenges in preserving traditional elements, and their impact on interreligious relations. This methodology enables the research to offer insights into how state policies influence the religious practices of the Chinese community and how Tridharma syncretism serves as a potential model for harmonious interreligious relations in Indonesia.

Results

Tridharma and Syncretism Then and Now

The Tridharma policy, which has evolved since the New Order period, has significantly impacted the structure, identity, and function of Chinese houses of worship in Indonesia. Under this policy, Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism were merged into a single religious body called the Tridharma. This merger was initially a state political strategy aimed at simplifying the recognition of Chinese religions and controlling Chinese ethnic identity amid the politics of assimilation. One direct consequence of this policy was the change in the name and status of the temple to a

monastery, which was perceived as more neutral and aligned with the official state religious framework.

The renaming of the temple during the New Order period was not only an administrative change; it also impacted how the community interpreted the identity and function of this place of worship. On the one hand, this policy creates confusion in distinguishing between temples as places of worship for Buddhists and those that serve as syncretistic traditional Chinese places of worship. On the other hand, this change has also shaped a misleading public perception, as if all Chinese places of worship are monasteries. This view was expressed by a Buddhist scholar who stated:

> "…As far as I know, in the past, each clan worshipped its gods. Taoism and Confucianism developed and later syncretized with Buddhism, so the temple is better known as the most prominent of the Tridharma groups. Historically, the government was anti-Chinese, resulting in the names of the temples being changed to Viharas, and its influence continues until now.*"(interview form informant, 2024)*

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In the religious practices of the Chinese community in Indonesia, the phenomenon of syncretism, or cross-faith worship, is common and has become part of the daily life of the people. One of the speakers mentioned that "in the matter of joint worship or so-called 'syncretism' for Confucians, it is not a problem," because it is customary for Buddhists to follow the Confucian way of worship. Conversely, Confucians also do not mind worshiping in the Buddhist way. In the context of the Tridharma teachings, which combine elements of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, such practices are considered natural, as they complement and do not contradict each other within Chinese tradition and culture. Many Chinese people practice all three teachings simultaneously in their daily lives, without feeling the need to choose one over the others exclusively. For example, they can pray to the Buddha, honor ancestors according to Confucian ethics, and live by the Taoist principle of balance and harmony.

> "…Within the broader Chinese community, many people practice these three teachings in their daily lives, even if they might technically identify with one particular religion. They could have prayed to the Buddha, honored their ancestors according to the Confucian tradition, and followed the Taoist teachings on the balance of life. The Chinese community, many people practice these three teachings in their daily lives, even if they might technically identify with one particular religion. They could have prayed to the Buddha, honored their ancestors according to the tradition of Confucianism, and followed Taoism's teachings on the balance of life." *(Interview with informant, 4 November 2023)*

However, numerous critical views have also emerged regarding the term "syncretism" itself. One of the speakers emphasized that what occurred was not the unification of teachings into a new religion, but rather the tolerance between the two in the same worship space. "Syncretism in the sense of uniting three religions certainly does not happen," he said, because there is no common scripture that unites the three. All that exists are religious practices carried out side by side in the same place of worship, while still maintaining their ordinances. He noted that within the Tridharma body itself, competition often arises between groups, which shows that symbolic unity in the worship space does not always reflect ideological or institutional unity. He further said:

> "…Syncretism in the sense of uniting three religions, of course, does not happen; what exists is tolerance by deviating according to their respective religions in one place of worship, so it is not one religion, but one place of worship is the same. Since there is no common 'Scripture', there is no 'syncretism', there is even a competitor in the Tridharma." *(Interview with informant, 4 November 2023)*

The official recognition of Confucianism as a religion during the Reformation era, bolstered by the establishment of a religious institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the existence of a special worship site called Li Thang, has enhanced the position of Confucians in their demands for the restoration of their original identity at their place of worship. Confucians assert that temples have been traditional Chinese places of worship since the beginning, so the name change to a monastery during the New Order period is viewed as an attempt to obscure their religious identity. However, efforts to restore the temple's name have not always proceeded smoothly. Places of worship currently managed by the Buddhist community often face obstacles in the name restoration process, while temples operated by Confucians are more likely to regain their original identity. Lamirin, a Buddhist academic, said

> "…The current development, following the government's recognition of the Confucian term Tridharma, is also ambiguous; moreover, the place of worship is also unclear. The Tridharma is similar to the Temple and Confucianism, where the place of worship is referred to as Lintang (Litang). Still in their internal conflict. Because Confucianism itself in China is not a religion but a belief." *(Interview with informant, 4 November 2023)*

Following the re-recognition of Confucianism as an official religion, Confucian adherents began consolidating their organizational structure through the establishment of the High Council of Indonesian Confucianism (MAKIN) across various regions. Many temples formerly affiliated with Indonesian Tridharma (GTI) or Walubi—two major organizations overseeing Tridharma worship during the New Order—withdrew to join MAKIN, sparking tensions and perceived destabilization of GTI's authority. This institutional realignment revealed a deeper identity conflict among Chinese Indonesians who had long identified with Tridharma. As noted by one informant, "many are Confucians but have Buddhist ID cards," and some were reluctant to return to Confucianism due to their established roles and income within Buddhist institutions. This group is viewed by some as hindering Confucianism's post-separation growth. The conflict's impact extends beyond symbolism or administration, manifesting concretely in issues such as temple construction—exemplified by ongoing legal and logistical challenges at a temple site in Binjai, North Sumatra.

> "…One example, the construction of a temple in Binjei, North Sumatra, even though it is now in the licensing process, but it has encountered obstacles, because the community has supported 90 people, then they turned away from supporting it because they were "instigated" by those who are Confucians but their ID cards are Buddhists (some who have Buddhist ID cards, are asked to turn around and do not support the construction of the Temple). Even though the construction has been established, the permit has not been issued until this interview is conducted".*(Interview with informant, 4 November 2023)*

Therefore, understanding the Tridharma and syncretism as described above cannot be separated from the historical context and accompanying power relations. It involves not only doctrine and daily religious practice but also institutional dynamics, identity conflicts, and the bargaining positions of minority communities within the state structure. The Tridharma reflects that religion does not develop in a vacuum; it is always shaped by external conditions that influence how communities believe, organize, and negotiate with greater authority.

Discussion

Religious Uniformity Policy in the New Order Era

Religion is something that needs regulation by government policies; it is no different between the New Order and the Old Order. Regulations for the implementation of religion are not intended to interfere with religious freedom, as stipulated in Article 28E, Paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution, or Article 29, Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution. Another example is President Soeharto's Instruction No. 14 of 1967, which states that Chinese worship must be conducted internally within family or individual relationships. Celebrations of Chinese religious festivals and customs should not be conducted conspicuously in public, but should take place in a family environment. The implementation of their worship should be regulated by the Minister of Religious Affairs, after considering the Attorney General's opinion (PERMENEM). The security and orderly implementation of these instructions must be strictly overseen by the Minister of Home Affairs, together with the Attorney General.(BKMC - BAKIN, 2018)

During the New Order era, Chinese Indonesians struggled to accept the government's assertion of non-discrimination, especially as Presidential Instruction No. 14 of 1967 significantly restricted Chinese cultural and religious expressions. Despite continued economic privileges, the regime sought to distance itself from the Old Order's perceived closeness to Communism, partly in response to the anti-Communist sentiment among Indonesia's Muslim majority. Chinese religious and cultural practices, such as Lunar New Year celebrations, were banned, creating widespread fear and marginalization among Confucian and Taoist adherents (Oh, 2016). Many of them sought refuge in state-recognized religions, and Buddhism became the most favored alternative due to its historical affinity with Confucianism and Taoism (Tsuda, 2015). In this environment, Tridharma emerged not only as a legal and spiritual shelter but also as a continuation of the syncretic religious tradition initiated by reformers like Kwee Tek Hoay. It provided a framework for religious survival and cultural integration under political constraints.

The concept of Tridharma as a unifying religious identity among Chinese Indonesians can be traced back to the colonial period. In 1932, Kwee Tek Hoay introduced the idea through his writings in *Moestika Dharma* and *Sam Kauw Gwat Po*, advocating for the integration of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism under a single spiritual umbrella. This led to the establishment of Sam Kauw Hwee in 1935, which evolved into the Sam Kauw Indonesia Association (GSKI) and later the Indonesian Tridharma Association (GTI) (Koji, 2012). These institutions preserved and transmitted Tridharma teachings, especially through temples that served as centers of spiritual and social life (Suryadinata, 2014). During the New Order, particularly after 1967, Chinese temples were at risk of closure and delegitimization. In response, the community established PTITD in 1964 and Martrisia in 1969. After 1998's political reforms, these bodies formalized their doctrines, transforming Tridharma into a more institutionalized and recognized religious tradition.

To support their survival amid repression against Chinese culture, the PTITD and MARTRISIA organizations implement an institutional strategy. They utilize internal media platforms, like Hikmah Tridharma magazine and Tjahaja Tri-Dharma, to promote religious and cultural expression. These magazines showcase Tridharma not only as an ancestral spiritual heritage but also as a teaching that conforms to the state's legal and political realities. The syncretic practices of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism are skillfully integrated into a unified set of moral values, referred to as the "three virtues" (the Tri Dharma), rather than being seen as distinct or conflicting beliefs. This portrayal allows Tridharma to be perceived as a cohesive and legitimate religious tradition while sidestepping conflict with state ideologies that require uniformity in religious expression (Miharja et al., 2022).

Moreover, the magazine functions as a key platform for establishing both internal religious authority and external legitimacy. It showcases Confucian ideals that promote social harmony, Buddhist teachings that focus on compassion, and Taoist principles that emphasize balance in

life, all communicated in a manner that aligns with Indonesian nationalism and the values of Pancasila. Through this approach, the Tridharma community not only upholds its cultural identity but also aligns its teachings with the state's ideology. This representation illustrates how the Tridharma community navigates political pressures by adapting its doctrines and utilizing cultural media, framing religion as a means of survival and a space for dialogue among ethnicity, faith, and nationality.

Tridharma as a New Model of Syncretic Religion in Indonesia

According to the results of field research, some argue that Tridharma is a unique form of syncretism. However, it does not fully represent the doctrinal union of the three religions—Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. What occurs in practice is not unity in a theological or scriptural sense but rather ritual tolerance within a single worship space. The ummah from each religion continues to carry out their worship according to the teachings of their respective faiths, even though it takes place in the same location. Therefore, it is more accurate to understand Tridharma as a form of religious coexistence within a community rather than as a synthesis of teachings. Additionally, there can be a symbolic competition or authority among elements within Tridharma itself.

The fall of the New Order regime and the advent of the Reformasi era marked a significant opening of public space for Chinese cultural and religious expression in Indonesia (Sutrisno, 2018). The official recognition of Confucianism as a state religion, along with a broader atmosphere of religious tolerance, allowed Chinese-Indonesian communities greater freedom to express their faith more explicitly. As a result, syncretic practices—previously embraced as practical and political necessities—began to be critically reassessed in terms of their contemporary relevance. Some adherents who felt a stronger affinity with either Buddhism or Confucianism chose to distance themselves from the Tridharma framework, establishing more doctrinally focused religious institutions. This trend reflects a broader shift in religious identity—from a syncretic mode of expression to one that is more structured, formalized, and institutionally distinct.

Through Ulrich Berner's framework, the development of the Tridharma emerges as a syncretic process influenced not only in symbolic terms but also by a critical socio-political environment (Bernese, 2016). Berner (2016) points out that syncretism functions as a discursive practice that enables negotiation, rejection, and re-legitimization. For instance, internal disputes between Martrisia and the Tridharma Assembly illustrate how syncretism can be contested within institutional contexts, rituals, and relationships with state authorities. Berner stresses that analyzing syncretism should focus on the dynamics of power, inequality, and the institutionalization of meaning. Therefore, in the post-Reformation context of Tridharma, syncretic change is significantly shaped by the prevailing political and legal environment. Here, syncretism is not merely a spontaneous cultural occurrence but rather the result of negotiations among symbols, practices, and institutions during specific historical moments.

This explanation illustrates what Sigalow and Cadge (2013) describe as strategic syncretism—specifically, the deliberate blending of religious forms as a strategy to cope with structural pressures. During the New Order period, the Tridharma exemplified this strategy by integrating elements from Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism into expressions that were acceptable to the state while still accommodating the religious identity of the Chinese community. This choice of syncretism arises not from cultural spontaneity but rather as a socio-political strategy that enables communities to endure and negotiate with a regime that suppresses Chinese symbols and institutions. Therefore, the Tridharma's practice during the New Order exemplifies strategic

syncretism clearly and supports Berner's assertion that syncretism should be viewed as a reaction to power dynamics rather than simply as a theological amalgamation.

Sigalow pointed out that in a case study of Jewish Buddhists (JUBUs), social networks such as friends or partners did not significantly encourage syncretism. In contrast to religious conversion studies that emphasized the central role of social networks, JUBUs respondents discovered new religions like Buddhism through personal motivation. Even when married to a Christian partner or involved in a professional network, such as psychotherapy, they still explore Buddhism individually. This suggests that religious syncretism may operate under a different social logic than conversion; it relies less on interpersonal relationships and is more influenced by the construction of individual meanings shaped by historical experiences and certain social structures (Sigalow, 2016).

The social structure and system of the New Order era played a crucial role in shaping the conditions that facilitated the emergence of Tridharma syncretism. In Michel Foucault's (1979)framework, the modern state governs not only through regulation and violence but also through biopolitics—that is, the management of citizens' bodies and their spiritual well-being. Restrictions on Chinese culture, including bans on language and religious symbols, create a need to concoct a more "neutral" and acceptable form of religious expression. The Tridharma emerged as a response to this pressure by uniting the three traditions in a way that was perceived as more politically safe. Syncretism, in this case, is both a product of biopolitics and a space for cultural negotiation. It evolved into a form of religiosity influenced by state pressure and the strategies employed by minority communities.

Given this, Horrison's (2014) proposed categorization of symmetrical, asymmetrical, and reflective syncretism certainly acts as a useful starting point for analysis. However, a limitation of this framework is that it neglects the power dynamics that shape the formation of syncretism itself. In the context of Tridharma, syncretism arises not from a peaceful blend or a quest for lost spiritual elements, but instead as a strategic response to state repression during the New Order. The integration of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism was driven not only by spiritual aspirations but also as a survival tactic for the Chinese community within a legal and symbolic framework acceptable to the state. This suggests that syncretism does not always enhance traditions in a spiritual sense, as Harrison proposes; rather, it can serve as an adaptive strategy emerging from external pressures rather than solely from internal religious motivations.

Similarly, Pye's (1994) theoretical framework—particularly his insights on the coherence, ambiguity, and impermanence of syncretism—remains overly focused on textual analysis and does not adequately consider the institutional aspects and socio-political agency of those involved in syncretism. While Pye recognizes that syncretism can culminate in three outcomes—assimilation, dissolution, or synthesis—his framework often presents syncretism as a linear and normative progression. The experience of the Tridharma illustrates that syncretism can be complex, unfinished, and continually renegotiated within the context of power struggles, interactions with the state, and the internal dynamics of communities. In practice, syncretism is not just a result of interreligious interactions but also represents an evolving arena of political, symbolic, and institutional contestation.

Considering the historical and political complexities surrounding the formation of the Tridharma, the form of syncretism expressed by the Chinese community in Indonesia should be understood within the framework of new syncretism—a conceptual approach that emphasizes syncretism is not merely a theological blending of religious teachings but rather the result of a process of social, political, and symbolic negotiation that occurs reflectively and contextually. In this context, the

Tridharma cannot be reduced to a harmonious or spiritually neutral religious practice; it must instead be viewed as a strategic response to the New Order's power structure, which necessitates a form of religious expression that is both administratively and politically acceptable. Thus, the Tridharma represents a contemporary form of syncretism that is adaptive, institutional, and political —a syncretic formation arising from the active involvement of social actors in responding to power dynamics, rather than from purely essentialist spiritual impulses.

Conclusion

The case study of Tridharma demonstrates that syncretism extends beyond mere ideological or theological interactions among religions. It serves as a platform for expressing power, identity, and social strategies. In Tridharma, syncretism emerges as a creative response to repression, providing an avenue for articulating Chinese culture within the framework of Indonesian nationalism. However, shifts in socio-political structures compel the syncretic form to adapt or risk dismantlement. This demonstrates that syncretism is an evolving and flexible process rather than a fixed outcome. To fully understand syncretism, one must consider historical, political, and institutional influences, moving beyond the simple study of doctrinal blending to appreciate community agency in shaping religious identity under pressure. Tridharma, with its intricate nature, exemplifies how religion and power interact and negotiate, thus creating a new model of syncretism within Indonesia's religious landscape.

This finding suggests a reevaluation of the notion that syncretism always leads to spiritual enrichment or a blending of religious teachings. In the context of the Tridharma, syncretism serves as a space for political negotiation and cultural identity, influenced by evolving legal, institutional, and symbolic factors. Additionally, it indicates that overly prescriptive theoretical frameworks often overlook the complex reality of syncretism as a discursive practice characterized by tensions, internal disputes, and state influences. In the Tridharma, syncretism is dynamic and continues to evolve in response to shifts in power dynamics and public policies.

The researchers suggest that studies of religious syncretism, particularly in the context of Southeast Asia and minority societies, should not only rely on theological or textual approaches but also consider the historical, political, and institutional dimensions of religious practice. An interdisciplinary approach, which combines religious theories, political sociology, and discourse studies, would provide a more comprehensive explanation of complex syncretic practices, such as the Tridharma. Moreover, further research is necessary to examine the shift in religious identity after the reform, especially how communities that previously depended on syncretism are now beginning to develop more specific and institutionalized religious structures.

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